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# GRAMOPHONE **SOUNDS OF AMERICA**

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#### GRAMOPHONE talks to...

## Joel Fan

The pianist talks repertoire, technique, instruments...and race cars

#### The most obscure piece on your dancethemed disc is Cadman's Dark Dancers of the Mardi Gras - tell us a bit about it ...

Cadman was a prolific composer based in Pittsburgh and LA who helped found the Hollywood Bowl Orchestra. He was also known for introducing elements of ragtime into his music. Dark Dancers is a blast to play. As the soloist, you're riding this wave of rhythm, sound and texture created by the orchestra; there's this huge instrumentation and such a stirring finish.

#### Gottschalk's Grande Tarantelle is something of a rarity too - what's the story of the 'reconstruction' you've recorded?

The piece is originally for solo piano, but Gottschalk would arrange many of his pieces for different ensembles. His orchestration of the Grande Tarantelle was lost, so the composer and orchestrator Hershy Kay (he who orchestrated Bernstein's On the Town) made this orchestration. It became really well known when George Balanchine used it for his ballet Tarantella.

Can you sense the national characteristics in these pieces - the Gallic in Saint-Saëns, the Slavic in the Chopin?

Definitely. The Saint-Saëns Wedding Cake is so bubbly and elegant, like the fizz in a glass of champagne. The Chopin Krakowiak uses one of the national dances of Poland: you can just picture the dance and all its syncopations in your head when you hear the main theme. There's still that French effervescence in the Pierné but also a sense of visceral excitement too as he ventures through the materials; his work has more 'edge' than the Saint-Saëns. Then in the Castro Herrera you have a Mexican composer who writes at the turn of the century as if he were Liszt, with all of the virtuoso flourishes and octaves. It might not have a particular Mexican influence but it reminds you that dancing is universal - you can dance to a waltz in any country.

#### All those runs in Saint-Saëns's Valse-caprice sound effortlessly smooth - is that just practice, practice, practice?

There's truly no substitute for practice. Piano technique requires daily care - and then there are all the things you need to do to make music meaningful and emotionally impactful. As musicians you're constantly working on your technique so it can better serve your needs to express what you play. It's like you need to be both the race car driver and the



mechanic - making sure that the machine is capable of whatever twists and turns the mind desires.

#### So what race car do you have? Tell us about the instrument you used here...

There were actually two Steinway Ds available for the sessions, one that was shiny and brighter, while the other was older, mellower, less even, and not thought of as highly. But once we got to know the older Steinway, it proved to be a marvellous instrument, with plenty of colour and firepower, and also with all the overtones from the bass that are so unique to each Steinway. I'm always looking for instruments that are unusual and have idiosyncrasies, as exploring familiar music on different instruments is such a rewarding experience - it can bring unexpected discoveries in the music to light.

#### Cage

Sonatas and Interludes. In a Landscape<sup>a</sup> Kate Boyd pf

Navona (F) NV5984 (74' • DDD)

<sup>a</sup>Recorded live



By the time the 20 tracks of John Cage's Sonatas and Interludes wind up,

it's like hearing the return of the Aria in Bach's Goldberg Variations. Even if you had not kept up with all the individual parts, you know that something big and beautiful has happened. It's hard to know what Cage would have made of there now being 15 recordings of his seminal work for prepared piano, plus whatever's on YouTube. He would have liked the variety but might have worried about the dangers of repetitively listening to fixed versions of music that was meant to change at each re-performance.

In order to introduce some change in my review, I listened to this new recording - which was made in audiophile Eidson-

Duckwall Hall at Butler University, Indianapolis – on a variety of desktop and mobile devices, with earphones and with conventional and computer speakers. The effect each time was different, always surprising me with the sheer physical beauty of the sounds and silences being created. Since there was no predictability to what would catch my ear each time through, I was always curious to listen more.

The one constant was Kate Boyd's restrained, curious and positive playing, with the touch of a child approaching some

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Restrained, curious and positive: pianist Kate Boyd traverses John Cage's Sonatas and Interludes for Navona

wonderful music box, letting the music's hypnotic power just happen before it dies ineffably away, like at the end of the Second Interlude. Boyd immerses herself even more meditatively in the limpid Debussian colours of *In a Landscape*, providing a reminder of how drop-dead gorgeous Cage could make his prepared pianos behave.

Laurence Vittes

#### Karchin

'To the Sun and Stars'
American Visions<sup>a</sup>. To the Sun<sup>b</sup>. To the Stars<sup>c</sup>.
The Gods of Winter<sup>d</sup>. A Way Separate...<sup>e</sup>

\*Sharon Harms, \*Mary Mackenzie sops

\*\*ad\*Thomas Meglioranza bar\*\*Eric Sedgwick pf

\*Ekmeles; \*de\*Da Capo Chamber Players; \*aOrchestra
of the League of Composers / \*ad\*Louis Karchin

Bridge \*(E)\* BRIDGE9437 (58\*\* • DDD)



Louis Karchin (*b*1951) arrives on Bridge Records with a rich harvest of evocative

vocal music written between 1992 and 2012. Philadelphia-born Karchin, Professor of Music at New York University, has an easy way with a comprehensive range of musical materials, shifting seamlessly between speeds and creating absorbing narratives both dramatic and intimate.

Karchin's music is closely attuned to the content of the texts, and the texts he chooses for the two big works are complex and challenging: Yevgeny Yevtushenko's aggressive 'Who are you, Grand Canyon?' and two of the American poet Dana Goia's most powerful lyrics. The music itself, of course, provides compelling, alternative ways of understanding what the poets were trying to say.

Karchin co-founded the Harvard Group for New Music and the Orchestra of the League of Composers, and has conducted premieres of music by Elliott Carter, Charles Wuorinen, Joan Tower and Milton Babbitt; but he speaks in an accessible tonal style, with a knack for simple beauty backed by a colourful, flexible, open and populist musical arsenal punctuated with occasional outbursts of conventional classical music fireworks that reside somewhere between Beethoven and Bernard Herrmann.

Robert Carl's booklet-notes underline the importance of composers recording their own music. Karchin's approach in *American Visions* and *The Gods of Winter* is to lay down lines of structure and dynamic range in which his musical events can become organically embedded. Baritone Thomas Meglioranza has the lion's share of the vocal work and sings with eloquent passion and command.

Laurence Vittes

#### **Wheeler**

Crazy Weather. City of Shadows.

Northern Lights

Boston Modern Orchestra Project / Gil Rose

BMOP/sound (£) 1038 (54' • DDD)



A wonderful tensile energy operates on a subliminal aural screen behind the main

episodes in Boston-based Scott Wheeler's music; perhaps they are musical particle traces of the dancers' and singers' bodies 'that are the medium for the stage composer's work', as Wheeler modestly describes himself in the booklet-notes. In fact, Wheeler turns out to be a highly effective composer of classical music by virtue of a vivid aural imagination whose ingenious, garrulous products he crafts into absorbing symphonic soundscapes that make the hip Boston Modern Orchestra Project sound great.

Wheeler counts Stefan Wolpe, Franco Donatoni, Sondheim, late Mozart, Sibelius, Schoenberg, Copland, Weill and Bruckner among his influences, and cautions, 'If you hear echoes of their music in mine, it's because I learned so much from their passion and their skill.' In truth, however, his musical language is his own. It can flare up wild and romantic, but at other times, as in





City of Shadows, it is delightfully rich in comic-book scurrying around and dusted with hints of Britten.

Wheeler adapts with impressive ease to the three works' different territories: City of Shadows is a chamber symphony dedicated to Kent Nagano, while Crazy Weather for two string orchestras and Northern Lights for a very large orchestra were both Koussevitzky Foundation commissions. The performances are more than authoritative. Wheeler's music has an off-kilter attitude which suits the orchestra's own cool jazz-influenced musical sensibilities; they react quickly to Wheeler's sometimes audacious shifts in mood and get to display their very outstanding chops. Laurence Vittes

#### 'Confetti Man'

Bacharach/David Send Me No Flowers (arr McKay/Balakrishnan) Balakrishnan Alex in A major. Confetti Man Carisi Israel (arr Balakrishnan) D'Rivera La Jicotea Mintzer Windspan Powell Bouncin' with Bud (arr Smoczyński) Shorter Infant Eyes (arr Gutzeit) Summer Pattern Language: Julie-O Concert Etude #1 Turtle Island Quartet

Azica (F) ACD71296 (63' • DDD)



The Turtle Island Quartet have turned the genre of the string quartet on its ear in

repertoire that eagerly circumvents the mainstream. On their new disc, 'Confetti Man', the musicians pour irresistible energy and dazzling skills into pieces with roots in everything from bluegrass and jazz to rock and beyond.

The disc's title comes from David Balakrishnan's two-movement explosion of rousing and haunting ideas that embrace all of the influences above as well as Indian music. Balakrishnan has tapped into the Turtle Island's ability to bring a sense of improvisatory surprise to whatever they touch. The composer's invigorating artistry can also be gleaned in his arrangement of John Carisi's *Israel* and in his own bluegrass feast, *Alex in A major*, which calls upon the Turtle Island musicians to go wild with country fiddling.

Latin influences rub shoulders with contemporary techniques in Paquito D'Rivera's infectious *La Jicotea* ('Little Turtle'), and the ensemble proves as cosy in the tender lines of Wayne Shorter's ballad *Infant Eyes* as it is playfully subversive teaming with vocalist Nellie McKay

in the Burt Bacharach-Hal David pop tune Send Me No Flowers.

Turtle Island cellist Mark Summer has a moment in the sun performing his solo Pattern Language: Julie-O Concert Etude #1 with remarkable dexterity and flair. His colleagues rejoin him for the disc's finale, Bud Powell's bebop Bouncin' with Bud, in an arrangement by Turtle Island violinist Mateusz Smoczyński that brings out all of the coolest qualities in this singular group's artistic arsenal.

**Donald Rosenberg** 

#### 'Dances for Piano and Orchestra'

Cadman Dark Dancers of the Mardi Gras Castro Herrera Vals capricho, Op 1 Chopin Krakowiak, Op 14 Gottschalk/Kay Grand Tarantelle, Op 67 Pierné Fantaisie-ballet, Op 6 Saint-Saëns Valse-caprice, 'Wedding Cake', Op 76 Weber/Liszt Polonaise brillante, Op 72 S367 Joel Fan pf

Northwest Sinfonietta / Christophe Chagnard Reference Recordings (© RR134 (69' • DDD)



It might be interesting to know how many thousands of notes

Joel Fan plays on this

new recording. Each of the seven works calls for an artist who has no fear of cascading passagework and acrobatic leaps. Fan sounds perfectly at home in these virtuoso novelties, which are probably known to few musicians other than intrepid pianists.

But there's a great deal of charm to be found in the repertoire, which explores all sorts of dance idioms as realised by 19th-and early-20th-century composers. Several of them are titans, in their distinctive national ways, such as Saint-Saëns, whose delicious *Valse-caprice* in A flat major has the apt subtitle *Wedding Cake*. Weber's *Polonaise brillante* goes through a blockbuster transformation in Liszt's arrangement, while Chopin is in prime, majestic form in his *Krakowiak* in F major.

Less well known but equally disarming are Gabriel Pierné, whose *Fantaisie-ballet* is an exuberant ride, and Mexican composer Ricardo Castro Herrera, who paints all sorts of colours in his *Vals capricho*. Gottschalk's *Grand Tarantelle*, in a reconstruction by Hershy Kay, provides soloist and orchestra with a glittering showcase. The disc's real ear-opener is Charles Wakefield Cadman's *Dark Dancers of the Mardi Gras*, which exudes bountiful excitement and lyrical ardour.

The recorded sound is a bit distant, so turn up the volume to appreciate the fervour and dynamism Fan brings to his challenging duties. He immerses himself in a series of colourful collaborations with the Northwest Sinfonietta led by Christophe Chagnard.

**Donald Rosenberg** 

#### 'Dreams & Prayers'

Beethoven String Quartet No 15, Op 132 -Heiliger Dankgesang (arr A Far Cry) Golijov The Dreams & Prayers of Isaac the Blind Hildegard of Bingen O ignis spiritus paracliti (arr A Far Cry) Sanlıkol Vecd David Krakauer ci A Far Cry Crier Records © CR1401 (66' • DDD)



Here's how Miki-Sophia Cloud, a violinist in the Boston-based ensemble

A Far Cry, describes the programme she curated for the group's newest recording: 'This album explores music as a passageway between the physical and the divine as expressed over the mystical branches of three faith traditions and 1000 years of history. In each of these four works, something very simple – a breath, a word, a single note – is transformed into something transcendent, and even holy.'

Cloud doesn't exaggerate. The music and performances keep you transfixed, whether for spiritual or sonic reasons. Two selections are arrangements by members of the conductorless ensemble which put vital new spins on old music. The unison chants of Hildegard of Bingen's *O ignis spiritus paracliti* become communal celebrations as shaped by these superb musicians. Transcriptions of Beethoven string quartets for larger string forces aren't always persuasive but A Far Cry give such nuanced life to the third movement of Op 132 ('Heiliger Dankgesang') that the music's juxtaposition of the divine and the exhilarating is vividly achieved.

The two newer works also seize ears and soul. Mehmet Ali Sanlıkol's Vecd – Arabic for 'ecstasy' – conjures up a Sufi ceremony by building rhythmic momentum on increasingly propulsive phrases. From Jewish tradition, Osvaldo Golijov's *The Dreams & Prayers of Isaac the Blind*, already a contemporary classic, explores a spectrum of moods, with the clarinet and strings engaged in activity both introspective and wailing. The Criers, as the musicians of A Far Cry call themselves, truly soar with their guest, the spectacular clarinettist David Krakauer.

Donald Rosenberg



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## THE SCENE

Marin Alsop explores the waltz in Baltimore, Nelsons contrasts Mahler with Gandolfi in Boston, Garrick Ohlsson plays Chopin in Texas, and period instrumentalists perform Caldara in New York

#### ST LOUIS, MO

#### **St Louis Symphony**

#### Tchaikovsky and MacMillan (Mar 14 & 15)

David Robertson and the St Louis Symphony present Tchaikovsky's Symphony No 4, the composer's musical battle royal with fate which succumbs to its Russian roots in the last movement. Also on the programme is Scottish composer James MacMillan's Violin Concerto. a work which, says the New York Times, 'derives its considerable emotive impact from graceful and grotesque elements juxtaposed with a dreamy illogic'. The soloist on this occasion is Vadim Repin, who also performed the world premiere in 2010 with the London Symphony Orchestra. Debussy's atmospheric Nocturnes (here performed by Women of the St Louis Symphony Chorus) opens this intoxicating programme.

stlsymphony.org

#### BALTIMORE, MD

#### **Baltimore Symphony Orchestra**

#### Havdn and Ravel (Mar 20-22)

Music Director Marin Alsop and the Baltimore SO bring different aspects of the waltz to the fore, with symphonic selections from before and after the First World War - from the decadence of Richard Strauss to the macabre intimations of Ravel's La valse. Haydn's Cello Concerto in C also features, performed by the Gramophone Award-winning Sol Gabetta, who brings some Classical rigour to the hall

bsomusic.org

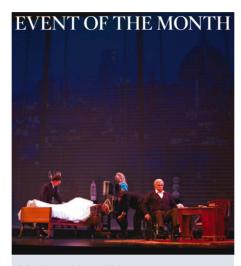
#### BOSTON, MA

#### **Boston Symphony Orchestra**

#### Andris Nelsons conducts Gandolfi & Mahler (Mar 26, 27, 28 & 31)

The future looks (and sounds) bright and brilliant for the Boston Symphony Orchestra and its new music director Andris Nelsons, who took the helm at the beginning of this season. It's already springtime and perhaps this concert will allow further insight into the musical mind of the maestro, juxtaposing the gorgeous sweep of Mahler's Symphony No 6 with a world premiere of a work for organ and orchestra by Boston-based composer Michael Gandolfi, who intends to showcase Symphony Hall's newly restored Aeolian-Skinner organ. The soloist here is the distinguished French organist Olivier Latry.

bso.org



#### SAVANNAH. GA Savannah Music Festival

#### Puccini: Suor Angelica & Gianni Schicchi (Mar 20 & 22)

The largest music festival in Georgia celebrates music from all genres. Breaking new ground this time, it introduces opera to the bill of fare. A co-production with the Savannah Voice Festival (SVF) offers two of the three one-hour operas from Puccini's Il trittico: Suor Angelica (a tragedy, here featuring soprano Verónica Villarroel) and Gianni Schicchi (a comedy, on this occasion featuring baritone Mark Delavan). These performances honour the great baritone Sherrill Milnes (the SVF's Artistic Director) on his 80th birthday. Beyond its opera offering, the festival (which runs from March 19 to April 4) showcases many great artists including Brooklyn Rider, the Emerson Quartet, Stephen Hough and Murray Perahia.

savannahmusicfestival.org

#### STANFORD, CA

#### Stanford Live at the Bing Concert Hall Neill and Rouse: The Demo (Apr 1 & 2)

An intriguing high-concept offering on the campus of Stanford University presented by Stanford Live, this is the world premiere of a musical-theatre work which mixes art and technology. Created, composed and performed by Ben Neill and Mikel Rouse, The Demo is a work inspired by a now legendary live demonstration of early computer technology given by Douglas C Engelbart of Stanford Research Institute

in 1968. Known as 'the mother of all demos'. it was the public debut of many computing features we now use, including the computer mouse, hypertext and sending audio and video over a network. The composers reimagine this demo as 'a technologically infused music/video performance', combining live and electronic music. video and so on. The typed text of the demo serves as the libretto for the vocals.

live.stanford.edu

#### HOUSTON, TX **Houston Symphony**

#### Ohlsson plays Chopin (Apr 17-19)

The Houston Symphony's recently appointed Music Director, Andrés Orozco-Estrada, continues to push the envelope with some thrilling musical juxtapositions - two works by Jennifer Higdon flanking Chopin's Piano Concerto No 1, the latter featuring Garrick Ohlsson as soloist. The concert opens with Higdon's Blue Cathedral, a profound work that's both contemplative and ecstatic, and which channels the composer's grief at the sudden loss of her brother. Higdon's Concerto for Orchestra, commissioned and premiered by the Philadelphia Orchestra in 2002, demands virtuosity from the principal players, the individual sections and the entire orchestra.

houstonsymphony.org

#### NEW YORK, NY

#### **American Classical Orchestra**

#### Caldara: Maddalena ai piedi di Cristo (Apr 21)

The American Classical Orchestra specialises in repertoire of 17th- to 19th-century composers, performing works on original or reproduced period instruments and favouring historical techniques. A spring highlight features the renowned Czech Baroque soprano Hana Blažíková performing Maddalena ai piedi di Cristo, a masterpiece oratorio by Antonio Caldara (an unjustly neglected contemporary of Vivaldi). The concert also includes vocal works by Handel and Allegri (performed by the American Classical Orchestra Chorus), as well as Torelli's Trumpet Concerto in D major, played here by John Thiessen, ACO's Principal Trumpet.

americanclassicalorchestra.org

**Previews by Damian Fowler** 

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## Music venues can become powerful symbols

aris has a new concert hall. Architect Jean Nouvel's creation rises out of the north-east corner of the city, a thrilling new landmark alongside the ring road. It hasn't been an uncontroversial project, but the people behind it are bold about their stated aim of reaching out to the audiences of the future, both figuratively and (thanks to its location in a less expensive part of the city) literally. At this tragic moment in Paris's history, something so passionately seeking to draw increasing and diverse numbers of its inhabitants into the universal and life-enhancing world of music could prove a powerful beacon of hope.

Venues often become symbols, sometimes only emerging as such over time. To visit Hans Scharoun's Berlin Philharmonie now, sitting in the middle of a rejuvenated and united capital, it's easy to forget that this hall, which so radically rethought the very nature of an auditorium along democratic ideals, was for many years in an isolated area metres from one of the most destructive symbols of separation of the 20th century.

London's Royal Festival Hall dates from the Festival of Britain, a celebration of a more prosperous and peaceful society after the devastation of the Second World War. Even so, its place in the affections of a generation of young Londoners has been significantly enhanced since its redevelopment last decade.

Whether the Sage Gateshead, or LA's Walt Disney Hall or many others, the combination of inspiring architecture, welcoming public areas, unexpected locations and innovative programming can attract new people to an art form. This is equally true of

many museums and galleries. Visiting venues such as these can become not merely the end of a journey, but the beginning of one. Furthermore, that some of the most thrilling pieces of contemporary architecture are the preserve of public projects might not always come cheaply, but does speak well of an age.

What's fascinating, too, is when a recording venue earns such a status. Think of Abbey Road - it would be hard to make too strong a case for the brick building bolted behind a Georgian townhouse, but has any other studio an equal emotional tug? Many a suburban church, or municipal hall such as that in Walthamstow, or the much-missed Kingsway Hall, has found a powerful place in the collector's consciousness.

That these venues have also become symbols is primarily down to the brilliance of the music made within them. But beyond that, it is also because recording has allowed music lovers, wherever they live, to 'step into them'. Radio has done likewise to a certain extent, but the ability of the internet to allow venues to offer real audiences a virtual front-of-house seat has transformed this. Online streaming by the Berlin Philharmonic, the Royal Opera House, Glyndebourne and others has brought halls alive for music lovers throughout the world more vividly than reputation or radio alone could ever do. That the Philharmonie de Paris will live-stream substantial numbers of its concerts, for free, and then offer them in an archive, will further enhance its mission of outreach, and could potentially build a bond with audiences who may, or even may not, set foot in the hall.

martin.cullingford@markallengroup.com



#### THIS MONTH'S CONTRIBUTORS



For writer CAROLINE GILL. it was 'a total joy to work on this month's Franck Violin Sonata Collection.

'I listened to the work from beginning to end 57 times (I counted), with many more "mosaic" listenings as I picked out fragments to think more closely about,' she reminisces, 'And I loved it more, rather than less, at the end.'



Speaking to those closest to Jacqueline du Pré for this issue's cover feature was 'an honour and a privilege' for

Gramophone's Deputy Editor SARAH KIRKUP. 'I thought I knew a fair amount about her already. she says, 'but hearing from Daniel Barenboim, in particular, shed new light on her unique musicianship and vibrant personality.'



**HARRIET SMITH** revelled in writing about Grigory Sokolov for this month's Icons feature. 'Submersion in

his music was a dream gig for this pianophile,' she says of the Russian pianist who famously tends to avoid the recording studio at all costs. 'But distilling the allure of such a musical giant was nevertheless quite a challenge.'

THE REVIEWERS Andrew Achenbach • Nalen Anthoni • Mike Ashman • Philip Clark • Alexandra Coghlan • Rob Cowan (consultant reviewer) • Jeremy Dibble • Peter Dickinson • Jed Distler • Duncan Druce • Adrian Edwards Richard Fairman • David Fallows • David Fanning • Iain Fenlon • Fabrice Fitch • Jonathan Freeman-Attwood Caroline Gill • Edward Greenfield • David Gutman • Lindsay Kemp • Philip Kennicott • Tess Knighton • Richard Lawrence • Ivan March • Ivan Moody • Bryce Morrison • Jeremy Nicholas • Christopher Nickol • Geoffrey Norris Richard Osborne • Stephen Plaistow • Peter Quantrill • Guy Rickards • Malcolm Riley • Marc Rochester • Julie Anne Sadie • Edward Seckerson • Hugo Shirley • Pwyll ap Siôn • Harriet Smith • Ken Smith • David Patrick Stearns • David Threasher • David Vickers • John Warrack • Richard Whitehouse • Arnold Whittall • Richard Wigmore • William Yeoman

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#### EDITOR'S CHOICE

The 12 most highly recommended recordings of the month

#### FOR THE RECORD

The latest classical music news











8

28

30

50

64

78

86

90

96





#### RECORDING OF THE MONTH

Piotr Anderszewski plays Bach

#### **ORCHESTRAL**

Elschenbroich plays Russian cello concertos; more Nielsen from the New York Philharmonic; a feast of British concertos for trumpet and strings

#### **CHAMBER**

Britten discovers his voice in early chamber works; debut recording from the prize-winning Amphion Quartet; reviving Graupner's Trio Sonatas

#### **INSTRUMENTAL**

Our critics digest reissues of Russian piano music, Beethoven's piano sonatas and new recordings of great pianists playing for the small screen

#### VOCAL

New recordings of Sandström's Nordic Mass, Monteverdi's Vespers and Parry's Songs of Farewell; discovering Henry Balfour Gardiner's songs

#### REISSUES

Revival for Decca's 'Phase 4' recording technique; box-sets of Sony conductors Walter and Zinman

#### **OPERA**

Braunfels's Verkündigung gets its second recording; Currentzis issues his latest Mozart opera; the Royal Opera's Parsifal on screen

#### REPLAY

Bach's Orchestral Suites from Fritz Reiner; Violinist Oscar Shumsky remembered by Doremi

#### **BOOKS** 98

Paul Spicer pens the first comprehensive biography of Sir George Dyson; Mark Berry asks what sway Richard Wagner held over modernism

#### GRAMOPHONE COLLECTION 104

Franck's Violin Sonata was an instant hit for the composer, but which recording should you buy?

#### **Teatures**

#### REMEMBERING DU PRÉ

10

Fifty years after Jacqueline du Pré made her classic recording of Elgar's Cello Concerto, Sarah Kirkup speaks to those closest to the cellist about her legacy - plus, Steven Isserlis offers his personal view of du Pré's Elgar interpretation

#### ECCENTRIC SCRIABIN

18

48

Geoffrey Norris explores the inner life and musical output of Alexander Scriabin, a composer with a limitless sense of self-importance and an equally expansive facility for musical invention

#### PARIS'S NEW 'MUSICAL CITY'

Martin Cullingford travels to the French capital for a behind-the-scenes tour of Europe's newest concert hall, the Philharmonie de Paris - can it introduce a new community to classical music?

#### THE MUSICIAN & THE SCORE

Kirill Gerstein and Jeremy Nicholas delve into a new edition of Tchaikovsky's First Piano Concerto

#### **ICONS** 62

Grigory Sokolov's precious few recordings place him in the front rank of pianists, says Harriet Smith

#### **CONTEMPORARY COMPOSERS**

Guy Rickards profiles the Gramophone Awardwinning Finnish composer Einojuhani Rautavaara

#### CLASSICS RECONSIDERED 100

Is the Thibaud, Casals and Cortot account of Schubert's Piano Trio No 1 still the benchmark?

#### THE SPECIALIST'S GUIDE 102

Ten 20th-century harpsichord music recordings

#### **PLAYLISTS** 110

Iberian polyphony; American mavericks; Christophe Rousset's most inspirational musicians

#### PERFORMANCES & EVENTS 113

The best streamed or broadcast events worldwide

#### HIGH FIDELITY 115

Marantz's desktop audio device; Ruark's radiogram

#### LETTERS & OBITUARIES 124

**NEW RELEASES** 126

#### **REVIEWS INDEX** 128

#### **MY MUSIC** 130

Actress and singer Janie Dee on concert-going, cabaret and crossing musical boundaries

# CD PREMIÈRES ON ELO QUENCE



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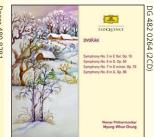




NICOLAI GHIAUROV Russian Songs and Arias



DALLAPICCOLA: Il Prigioniero Antal Dorati



DVORAK: Symphonies Nos. 3, 6, 7 & 8 Myung-Whun Chung



BORODIN: Symphonies Nos. 1 & 2; Polovtsian Dances Valery Gergiev; Vladimir Ashkenazy



STRAUSS: Ariadne auf Naxos\* (1970 studio recording) Karl Böhm



SUMMERTIME\* Songs by Arne, Barber, Berlioz, Elgar, Quilter, Schubert, Schumann Felicity Lott; Graham Johnson



ION VOICU\* The Decca Recordings – Mendelssohn, Bruch, Prokofiev, Milhaud, Debussy, Ysaÿe



SONGS WITH HARP\* Dowland, Campion, Pilkington, Jones, Traditional Welsh Songs Osian Ellis



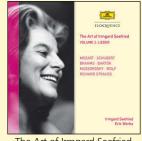
BEETHOVEN\* Symphonies Nos. 3, 7, 8; Die Weihe des Hauses Paul van Kempen



The Art of Irmgard Seefried Volume 1: Arias – Mozart, Bizet, Handel, Beethoven, Respighi



The Art of Irmgard Seefried Volume 2: Arias – Mozart, Weber, Thomas, Lortzing, R. Strauss



The Art of Irmgard Seefried Volume 3: Lieder – Mozart, Schubert, Brahms, Mussorgsky, Bartók, Wolf, R. Strauss



The Art of Irmgard Seefried Volume 4: Lieder – Schubert, Schumann, Beethoven, Cornelius



The Art of Irmgard Seefried Volume 5: Schubert Lieder



The Art of Irmgard Seefried Volume 6: Lieder – Schumann, Brahms



The Art of Irmgard Seefried Volume 7: Seefried & Friends sing Brahms



The Art of Irmgard Seefried Volume 8: Lieder – Wolf, R. Strauss



The Art of Irmgard Seefried Volume 9: Lieder – Wolf, Hindemith, Reger



The Art of Irmgard Seefried Volume 10: Lieder – Wolf, Egk



The Art of Irmgard Seefried Volume 11: Cantatas & Oratorios – Bach, Haydn, Gounod





# NEW RELEASES FROM WARNER CLASSICS & ERATO



#### AURORA ORCHESTRA ROAD TRIP

"An imaginative and carefullythought out" (Guardian) programme of works by John Adams, Ives, Copland and Nico Muhly



#### PHILIPPE JAROUSSKY NIOBE REGINA DI TEBE

World premiere recording of Agostino Steffani's sumptuous 1688 opera featuring star countertenor Philippe Jaroussky



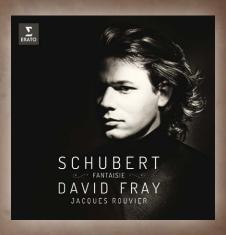
#### JEAN RONDEAU BACH - IMAGINE

A dynamic young artist presents his debut recital, an exciting programme of Bach's most celebrated harpsichord works



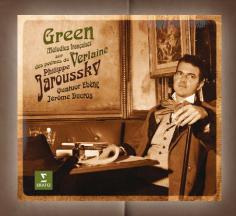
#### VILDE FRANG MOZART CONCERTOS

Following the success of her discs of Romantic and Late Romantic repertoire, Vilde Frang returns with Mozart Concertos



#### DAVID FRAY SCHUBERT - FANTASIE

David Fray returns to Schubert with his second recording of the composer's piano music, a collection of passionate late works



#### PHILIPPE JAROUSSKY GREEN

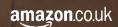
Following the ground-breaking album Opium. countertenor Philippe Jaroussky explores settings of poems by Paul Verlaine











## GRAMOPHONE Editor's choice



**Cullingford's** pick of the finest recordings from this month's





#### JS BACH

**Enalish Suites** Nos 1, 3 & 5 Piotr Anderszewski pf Warner Classics © 2564 62193-9 ► HARRIET SMITH'S

**REVIEW IS ON** PAGE 28

There's a beautifully controlled thoughtfulness, lines explored with illuminating delicacy and a complete confidence in the interpretation. A Bach piano disc to set among the best of recent years.



#### **JS BACH**

**Orchestral Suites Academy of Ancient** Music / Richard Egarr hpd **AAM Records** 

**(F) (2) AAMOO3** 

Another fine addition to the AAM's young in-house label, and what better way than this to showcase the ensemble's delightfully engaging spirit of collegiality?

► REVIEW ON PAGE 30



#### **PENDERECKI**

Chamber Works, Vol 1 Marek Szlezer pf et al Dux © DUX0780 Mostly recent works, these chamber

pieces offer an intense and captivating distilled insight into Penderecki's compositional voice.

► REVIEW ON PAGE 57



#### 'THE SALZBURG **RECITAL'**

Grigory Sokolov pf DG (F) (2) 479 4342GH2 An aversion to the studio makes

recordings of Sokolov rare indeed - an extra reason to welcome this live recital from 2008, proof if any were needed of why the pianist is this month's Icon.

► REVIEW ON PAGE 70



#### **VAUGHAN WILLIAMS**

Pastoral Symphony, etc Hallé Orchestra / Sir Mark Elder Hallé (F) CDHLL7540 Continuing to excel in works that feel made

for them, Sir Mark Elder and the Hallé offer a richly textured traversal through some of RVW's most elegiac music.

► REVIEW ON PAGE 42



#### **CHOPIN** Etudes Zlata Chochieva pf Piano Classics **PCL0068** The young Russian

pianist follows her 2013 Rachmaninov disc with a wonderful set of Chopin's Etudes, maintaining a

beautifully entrancing tone throughout the pieces' challenges and changes.

► REVIEW ON PAGE 64



'AU SAINCT NAU' **Ensemble Clément** Janequin / **Dominique Visse** Alpha © ALPHA198 In defence of

highlighting this Christmas disc now, it's only just Epiphany as I write; anyway, this entertaining feast of music-making will bring much delight whatever the season.

► REVIEW ON PAGE 83



#### **MOZART**

Serenade No 11. Divertimentos Scottish Chamber **Orchestra Wind Soloists** Linn 🖲 🎂 CKD479

These performances wonderfully capture the charm of these Mozart chamber works, each instrument oozing a delightfully unforced sense of personality.

► REVIEW ON PAGE 57



#### **MOZART**

Keyboard Music, Vol 7 Kristian Bezuidenhout fp Harmonia Mundi **F HMC90 7531** Hearing Mozart's

sonatas played so brilliantly by Bezuidenhout on a fortepiano leaves rich scope for unexpected discoveries; a superb addition to the series.

► REVIEW ON PAGE 65



#### VERACINI

Adriano in Siria Soloists; Europa Galante / Fabio Biondi Fra Bernardo M 3 FB1409491

Veracini was best known as a violinist and composer for that instrument. The dramatic contrasts and theatrical arias make this opera well worth hearing too.

► REVIEW ON PAGE 93



#### **DVD/BLU-RAY**

MAHLER Symphony No 9 Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra / Riccardo Chailly

Accentus (F) 222 ACC20299; (F) 222 ACC10299 A moving, powerful Mahler Ninth from one of today's leading conductor/ ensemble relationships.

► REVIEW ON PAGE 36



#### **REISSUE/ARCHIVE** JOHN SHIRLEY-QUIRK

'English Song' Heritage ® 2 HTGCD283/4 Beautifully eloquent

story-telling from the fondly remembered British bass-baritone.

► REVIEW ON PAGE 84



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qobuz.com

**GRAMOPHONE** FEBRUARY 2015 **7** gramophone.co.uk

The Leeds International Piano Competition was founded by



Classics for Warner Music UK. A muchrespected record company executive with a proven track record, Lemanski will lead the Kensington-based operation which markets and distributes the Warner Classics and Erato labels. The President of Warner Classics, Alain Lanceron, made the announcement at a Christmas party at Warner Music's London offices: 'As Warner Classics continues to grow, Patrick will make a tremendous addition to our team and we look forward to his

leadership of our UK arm.'
Lemanski, who has been with
Harmonia Mundi for the past 19 years,
said: 'Having worked for many years in
the classical music industry, I have always
admired [Warner Classics'] prestigious
catalogue. I am also very attracted by
their resolute embrace of new, ambitious
projects. I look forward to contributing
to the company's continued success
and leadership.'

# FOR THE RECORD



Honoured for his services to music: Aldeburgh Music's Chief Executive Roger Wright has been named a CBE

# Roger Wright heads classical music names in the New Year's Honours

he 2015 New Year's Honours have included several awards for classical musicians and arts administrators. Roger Wright, the former Controller of BBC Radio 3 and the Proms who is currently Chief Executive of Aldeburgh Music has been named a CBE. He said: 'I am thrilled to be honoured for my work in the service of music. Not only is it recognition of the unique value and importance of music and the arts in all our lives, it is also huge tribute to my colleagues both past and present, who brilliantly bring so many performances to fruition, and make them accessible for everyone.'

Also receiving CBEs are Jude Kelly (Artistic Director of Southbank Centre), opera director Richard Jones and Alan Davey (former Chief Executive of the Arts Council and successor to Roger Wright as Controller of BBC Radio 3).

Jeffrey Skidmore, Artistic Director of Ex Cathedra, has been awarded an OBE.

The British choir's 'A French Baroque Diva' album, with soprano Carolyn Sampson and conducted by Skidmore, was a *Gramophone* Editor's Choice in July 2014. Also receiving an OBE is John Lubbock, founder and Principal Conductor of the Orchestra of St John's.

Violinist Rodney Friend has been awarded an MBE. Friend has been the Leader of the LPO, New York Phil and BBC Symphony Orchestra; he also founded the Solomon Trio.



## BBC unveils a Year of Song and Dance across radio and TV

programme exploring the real-life drama behind Verdi's opera *La traviata* (BBC Two), the BBC Cardiff Singer of the World under the patronage of Dame Kiri Te Kanawa (BBC Four/Radio 3), *The Golden Age of Singing* introduced by Sir Antonio Pappano (BBC Four) and Simon Russell Beale telling the story of the Monteverdi Vespers in the

company of The Sixteen and Harry Christophers (BBC Two) are among the classical highlights of the BBC's year-long focus on song and dance.

The dance focus will see Birmingham Royal Ballet's Artistic Director David Bintley exploring the birth of ballet during the reign of Louis XIV, Wim Wenders's film on the German dancer and choreographer Pina Bausch,

an in-depth documentary about the dance company BalletBoyz, Strictly Modern Dance (the story of contemporary dance) and the inaugural BBC Young Dancer competition, hosted by Darcy Bussell.

In May, Petula Clark explores the French chanson and this month Reginald D Hunter tells the story of 150 years of American popular song.



Celebrations: Patrick Lemanski (centre) with HM colleagues at the 2014 Gramophone Awards

#### Classic FM's Darren Henley is named CEO of the Arts Council

Arts Council England has announced that Darren Henley will be its new Chief Executive, succeeding Alan Davey who is now Controller of BBC Radio 3. Henley, who is currently Managing Director of Classic FM, is the author of two significant government reviews of music and cultural education (in 2011 and 2012), and has written 27 books, most of which focus on classical music.

#### Lifetime Achievement Grammy is presented to Pierre Boulez

The Recording Academy has honoured conductor and composer Pierre Boulez with a Lifetime Achievement Grammy Award alongside the Bee Gees, Buddy Guy, George Harrison and Wayne Shorter. Boulez turns 90 on March 26. In the past, he has received several *Gramophone* Awards both as a composer and a conductor, including Artist of the Year in 1995, and has served as Music Director of the New York Philharmonic and Cleveland orchestras, as well as Chief Conductor of the BBC Symphony Orchestra.



Kiri Te Kanawa: patron of Cardiff Singer of the World

#### Naxos launches new HD music streaming and download service

he music streaming and download arena is maturing rapidly with the growth of lossless services such as Qobuz and Tidal, and the impending arrival of Meridian's MQA technology claiming to make even high-resolution music files streamable over existing internet connections. Now Naxos has joined the fray with the worldwide launch of ClassicsOnline HD•LL, a dedicated classical music service offering not only downloads but also streaming at up to 24-bit/192kHz quality.

Building on the success of the company's Naxos Music Library subscription service which launched in 2002, ClassicsOnline HD•LL is now available for £11.99 per month, and offers a search facility tailored to classical music, plus a catalogue drawn from most of the leading classical record labels, allowing users to discover new artists and repertoire.

Subject to available content, bandwidth and hardware, it's then possible – thanks to the system's use of adaptive bitrate streaming and dedicated player software – to stream music in quality from 24-bit/44.1kHz right up to 24-bit/192kHz, or to buy music for download at anything from MP3 up to high-resolution FLAC. There's also the option to cache streaming content for offline listening.

Naxos founder Klaus Heymann is proud of his company's most recent innovation: 'The new platform is proof of our commitment to making a wide range of classical music available in state-of-the-art sound with a sophisticated search capability utilising the vast database of our various classical music services.'

The Naxos service increases the momentum of high-resolution download and streaming services, which look set to become a major part of high-quality listening in 2015. The next few months will see the launch of two new music stores, with Onkyo extending its e-Onkyo offering beyond Japan to markets including the USA and Europe, and Technics introducing its Technics Tracks service in support of its return to the home audio arena.

# GRAMOPHONE Online

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#### **PODCASTS**

Listen to a podcast made at the first EFG *Gramophone* Conversation at Foyles, in which Sir James Galway (pictured) talked to James Jolly about learning the flute, and recalled his years with Karajan and the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra.



#### **REVIEWS DATABASE**

Offering more than 30,000 *Gramophone* reviews from 1983 to the present, our dedicated and fully searchable Reviews Database makes reading three decades' worth of *Gramophone*'s expert critics' views easier than ever before.

#### **GRAMOPHONE'S TOP 10s**

If you're after a recording recommendation for a particular work, then a *Gramophone*Top 10 list is the perfect place to visit. We have Top 10s dedicated to everything from the works of Rachmaninov, Beethoven and Mozart to genres such as symphonies, string quartets and British choral works. Each recommended recording is linked to its original *Gramophone* review, and we are frequently adding new Top 10 lists, so do keep your eyes peeled.

# God-given talent, ESS ARTISTRY

Fifty years after her iconic Elgar Cello Concerto recording, Jacqueline du Pré's cello playing remains as vital and influential as ever. Sarah Kirkup speaks to those closest to du Pré to understand what makes her legacy so unique

to her illness, but she would have preferred

to be known for her music' - Daniel Barenboim

ome musicians stand the test of time. Their gifts and talents for music-making continue long after they have ceased to perform, thanks to audio and visual recordings and the memories of those whose lives they have touched through personal encounters and concert performances.

Jacqueline du Pré is one such musician. This year marks half a century since her classic recording of the

Elgar Cello Concerto with Sir John Barbirolli and the London Symphony Orchestra. Not only that but, were she still with us, she would have been celebrating her 70th birthday this month. Yet despite the

passing of time, her presence remains keenly felt.

What was it about her musicianship that made her unique? Was she, perhaps, in the right place at the right time? The 1960s signified a social and cultural revolution during which a more liberal, expanded way of thinking became the norm. Du Pré, with her extrovert style of playing, fitted into this new ideal. As Daniel Barenboim says, 'She was so free, emotional and carefree - not careless - that perhaps she represented what many people in England wished they could be but didn't quite manage to be.'

In recent times, it's been almost impossible to separate du Pré's achievements as a musician from the tragedy of her early death from multiple sclerosis at the age of just 42. I for one find it difficult to hear one of her recordings or watch her on film without feeling a sense of loss. What could have been? What was still to come? Here is an artist whose career as a professional cellist lasted barely a decade, and yet in that time she revealed herself to be both a fine chamber musician and a soloist. Her recordings of the Beethoven and Brahms cello sonatas, with Stephen Kovacevich and Barenboim respectively, testify to this, as do her many concerto recordings, which include not just the Elgar but also those by Boccherini, Haydn, Dvořák, Schumann, Delius and Saint-Saëns. What would she have been capable of had she not had to retire

at the age of 28? Would People try to relate her musical importance contemporary music have gained more of an appeal for her? (Notwithstanding Alexander Goehr's Romanza, a piece written expressly for her in 1968 and which she evidently

enjoyed playing, du Pré frequently voiced her dislike of 'modern' music.) Would she have been active in expanding the repertoire for cello through the commissioning of new works? What new musical partnerships and collaborations would she have developed? Listening to her perform the Elgar, in particular, the sense of nostalgia and yearning already present in that work can take on a new dimension when considering the debilitating illness that was just around the corner. But perhaps there is a danger in viewing du Pré's musical achievements through the prism of tragedy. As Barenboim says of his first wife: 'People try to make her musical importance relative to her illness, but I'm absolutely sure that she would have preferred to be known for her music.'

From the age of four, when she first heard the cello on Children's Hour on the radio, du Pré was drawn to the instrument: 'That is the sound I want to make,' she told her





'Instant rapport'; the connection between 'musical conversationalist' Jacqueline du Pré and pianist Daniel Barenboim, whom she married in 1967, is abundantly clear

'When you're young you should have an

excess of everything. If you haven't, what

will you pare off later?' - Sir John Barbirolli

mother. Iris du Pré immediately found a full-size instrument for her daughter, who wasted no time in setting about mastering it. Her attraction to the instrument was instant and intense; by the age of six she was performing on stage at the London Cello School and, by all accounts, stealing the limelight. Many witnesses during her short career testify to her lack of nerves ahead of a performance or a recording. In fact, it seems that she was perhaps more comfortable performing than not; as she once noted in her diary, 'An artist can be at his loneliest

in company; and at his fullest, most replete and expansive when alone with his art.' Even filmmaker Christopher Nupen, who was a close friend of du Pré, admits that although 'she was not unhappy when she

was not playing the cello, she was at her happiest playing it and playing it well'. And playing it well invariably meant performing to an audience; an audience – whether comprising schoolchildren, acquaintances or the paying public – was what du Pré thrived on. As she said to Stephen Kovacevich (then Stephen Bishop), her one-time duo partner: 'I've been blessed with a god-given talent and it's my privilege to share it with my friends.'

It was this desire to communicate with others – and the seemingly effortless ability to do so – that made du Pré such an exceptional musician. It's the one subject on which everyone I speak to for this article agrees. For Barenboim, she was 'a musical conversationalist'. For Kovacevich, she 'always had something different to say'. For the American cellist Alisa Weilerstein, who recorded the Elgar with Barenboim in 2013,

she 'had a direct line of communication with everyone'. And for Nupen, she 'radiated something when she played'.

It was as if her instrument was, to quote Stravinsky, 'the vessel through which the music flowed'. The cello was a means to an end, and, despite her inferiority complex when it came to technique (when Rostropovich asked her, in 1966, what she wanted to learn from him, 'technique' was her immediate response), she was able to find her way around any practical difficulties for the sake of the music. Yet she wasn't particularly

interested in learning the story behind the work in question or expanding her knowledge about the composer. As her friend the pianist Guthrie Luke has said: 'I asked her, "When did Haydn write this concerto?"

She had no idea and simply didn't care. There was no point in discussing such things with her. She played the work superbly, without knowing anything about its background history.' It seemed the music told her all she needed to know. As Barenboim says, 'She had a capacity that was very rare – she could become one with the music. She didn't have to learn the notes and think what to do with them – there was an immediate reaction to the music, as if she heard what she read.' He continues: 'She hadn't benefited from having a thorough training in theory and harmony but she had an uncanny instinct and was able to transmit that immediately.'

Everyone who saw du Pré play was caught up in the passion she conveyed, even though her wild physical movements were not to everyone's taste. Perhaps English critics at the time weren't used to such overt displays of emotion; perhaps,

12 GRAMOPHONE FEBRUARY 2015 gramophone.co.uk

as Kovacevich suggests, there was a certain amount of jealousy involved. Or perhaps there *was*, at times, an excess of emotion. But, as Barbirolli once said, 'When you're young, you should have an excess of everything. If you haven't, what are you going to pare off later on?' Barenboim agrees, adding that 'her excesses were always in very good taste'.

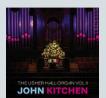
In any case, whether or not it was 'appropriate', du Pré's physicality became her trademark, and for the most part, audiences not only in England but also in Europe and, particularly, the US took her to their hearts. As Kovacevich recalls of the first time he heard her play (making her Wigmore Hall debut in 1961): 'We all fell for her. We were astonished at the level of communication and inspiration.' Not only that, he and others close to her are adamant that any movement on stage was entirely natural and akin to the music. As Nupen insists, 'There was never a single bat of the eyelid that was affectation.' Half a decade on, and the films of du Pré seem to reflect a joy of music-making rather than anything else. Her movements hardly seem wild – perhaps, thanks to Lang Lang and others, we've grown used to a more 'showmanship' style of playing - and in fact don't detract from the music at all. If anything, it could be said that they enhance it. She knows when the music requires her to pour her heart out and when she needs to hold back and her movements reflect this.

Du Pré also had a tender, more restrained side, as Kovacevich was reminded recently when he was sent a recording of a broadcast he had all but forgotten. 'I was so surprised at how subdued she could be,' he muses. 'The word innig - "inside" comes to mind.' Kovacevich has great affection for the recording he made with her of the two Beethoven sonatas, particularly the Second. 'At that time - and in fact it's the same today - there were only a handful of people who had some instinctive sense about how late Beethoven was different,' he tells me. 'There are some things Jackie - or "Superduper" as I used to call her - does that directly capture Beethoven's deep but sometimes almost abstract expression. In late Beethoven, there are phrases that are officially empty but of course they're not - they're revealing the absence of conventional musical ideas and the withdrawal into something completely unconventional. Jackie somehow understood this.'

Du Pré was an enthusiastic chamber music player and everyone who played with her was struck by her remarkable intuition. Back in 1963, when she was seriously questioning whether she wanted to be a professional cellist, chamber music remained a joy for her and this joy was infectious. As the violinist Ana Chumachenco has recalled, 'The force of her intuition was incredible.' It was much the same with her duo partners. Kovacevich recalls an 'instant rapport and appreciation of each other's gift'. There has been talk in the past of Kovacevich's 'classical' style being an antidote to du Pré's more flamboyant way of playing, but the pianist wasn't really aware of that. 'If she and I came to a point where we couldn't agree, it was normally about tempo,' he recalls. 'One of us would flip a coin, and whoever won, that movement was theirs.' That rapport was instant with Barenboim, too: 'The first evening I met her was at the home of Fou Ts'ong and Zamira Menuhin,' he recalls. 'We played chamber music and it was an immediate concert. It was perfectly natural playing with her.' It's a point echoed by violinist Pinchas Zukerman, who recalls of his chamber collaborations with du Pré and Barenboim, 'We never wrote things down, we never discussed tempi – it just fitted.'

But despite du Pré's gifts as a chamber music player, it was her association with the Elgar Cello Concerto, which she first performed aged 17, that fuelled the public's imagination.

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Guiding light: Sir John Barbirolli with Jacqueline du Pré, whom he had mentored since she was 10 years old, during a rehearsal for the Elgar Cello Concerto in Kingsway Hall

In live performance she was constantly

them feel absolutely right' - Christopher Nupen

Beatrice Harrison had recorded a complete version of the Elgar in 1928 with the composer conducting, and Pablo Casals had made a recording of it in 1945 with Sir Adrian Boult; other recordings followed, but none has earned the astonishing status and success among record buyers as du Pré's 1965 version with Barbirolli. The conductor had been following du Pré's progress ever since he had sat on the adjudicating panel of the Suggia Gift award when du Pré was 10 years old. When they eventually

gave their first concert together - with the Hallé at the Royal Festival Hall in April 1965 - it was a performance of the Elgar. doing things that surprised, and yet made Barbirolli was steeped in the Elgar tradition, they were both British musicians, the young

du Pré was able to breathe new life into an 'autumnal' work... It was a perfect match.

Four months later, at Kingsway Hall in London, du Pré and Barbirolli were joined by the LSO to record the work. It was a momentous occasion, as Gramophone critic Edward Greenfield recalls: 'The orchestra wasn't in the best of moods because of some internal dispute...They recorded the first movement and the scherzo almost in one go, and at the end of that the LSO, forgetting their bad temper, broke out into spontaneous applause, something that is relatively rare in a recording session.'

Du Pré's interpretation continues to have much the same impact today. 'It's still my favourite recording,' says Weilerstein. 'But when I was 12 I decided to learn the Elgar myself and I had to develop my own relationship with the work so I put her recording away.' Steven Isserlis, on page 16, talks of a similar

desire to distance himself from such a landmark recording. Only now that he's recorded the work himself (for the second time) has he dared to listen to it again.

Du Pré went on to record the work once more, with Barenboim, and in 1967 Nupen filmed them both performing it with the New Philharmonia Orchestra at Wood Lane studios before an invited audience. The film is a moving testament to both the rapport between the two musicians and du Pré's ability

to express, with directness and searing intensity, the emotional core of Elgar's 'war requiem'. Amazingly, Nupen filmed the whole concerto in one take: 'I was nervous because I'd never shot a live concert in my life,'

he admits. 'For six weeks afterwards my crew were coming to me and saying how inspiring the experience had been.'

As I mentioned earlier, while researching this piece I found myself wondering if du Pré was a product of her time – if the period in which she lived was particularly conducive to her 'celebrity' appeal. Had she lived earlier or later, perhaps she might not have enjoyed such wide-ranging influence.

For Nupen, the 1960s was certainly 'a time of discovery. Because of television, Jackie and this new generation of musicians – Barenboim, Zukerman, Ashkenazy, Perlman – were discovering a new world and making a new world. When people had something to say, they could address the entire population for the first time in history.' Kovacevich agrees that it was 'a golden age'. He enthuses: 'The audiences were younger, marvellous artists came, you could afford the tickets...

14 GRAMOPHONE FEBRUARY 2015 gramophone.co.uk Freedom was all around.' Barenboim, meanwhile, admits that du Pré 'had a classical status comparable to The Beatles'.

So perhaps the buzz of the 1960s and its accompanying technology propelled du Pré into the spotlight a little quicker than might otherwise have been the case – but most people I speak to believe she would have been famous whenever she had been born. Says Nupen, 'The essential thing with any artist is what they radiate and how the public responds to that,' while Weilerstein is convinced that 'the core of du Pré's artistry is timeless'.

I had also wondered if being a woman helped du Pré on her way to stardom? Female solo cellists were still relatively rare half a century ago (at least of the calibre of du Pré), and her magnificent presence on the podium – big dress, commanding physique, long, flowing locks - can't have done her any harm in the public eye. As Kovacevich says, 'Her appearance on stage was so wonderful – I'm trying to think of a masculine equivalent but I just can't.' Barenboim isn't convinced, however, and nor is Weilerstein: 'Her sex is completely irrelevant to me,' she says. 'It was more that she was so open and I wanted to be that way.' Nupen finds the middle ground: 'Her playing had nothing to do with femininity but her appeal to the world did.'

As for du Pré herself, she had mixed feelings about her role as a female cellist. In one interview, she denied any conflict between being a woman and a musician: 'I can't see that being a woman limits my playing, technically, in any way.' Later, however, when preparing to perform Shostakovich's First Cello Concerto – and probably feeling rather daunted at the prospect of taking over from where the work's dedicatee, Rostropovich, had left off - she said: 'A woman cannot play as a man plays - she hasn't the physique or the energy. Perhaps this contradictory nature of hers accounts for her ability always to say something unique in performance; as Nupen recalls, 'One of the great things about Jackie was that even when she recorded the same piece twice it was different the second time. In live performance, too, she was constantly doing things that surprised, and yet made them feel absolutely right. How something can be right and surprising is a mystery.'

Perhaps the word 'mystery' is the key here. In vain I've been trying to find a stone left unturned, a clue, a reason, to explain why du Pré had, and continues to have, such influence on fellow musicians and music lovers alike. But some things can't be explained – they just are. As Nupen says, 'To explain things is to devitalise them.' We should just be grateful that, through her films and recordings (her later recordings in particular are considered to be as vital and natural as her on-stage performances), we can experience first hand the talent that was Jacqueline du Pré.

But these recorded documents are only part of her legacy. Look at how she single-handedly manoeuvred the Elgar Cello Concerto into the mainstream cello repertoire. Or how she directly influenced musicians who are still dominating the classical music scene in the 21st century. Barenboim, for example, credits her with teaching him 'a huge amount about string playing. . . Unlike the piano, with a string instrument you have a whole range of colours at your disposal. I learned a lot from her.' Kovacevich, meanwhile, says that, musically, she 'loosened me up – and I'm sure some of that continued'. And let's not forget du Pré's ongoing influence, via her recordings and teachings, on Isserlis, Weilerstein and the other great cellists of today.

It's easy, particularly for the younger generations who only knew of her during or after her illness, to associate du Pré's achievements with her early death, but, as both Nupen and

Barenboim have warned, this is misguided; as Nupen says, 'To view her music through the tragedy is a ghastly mistake.' Like many other great musicians and composers before her, du Pré had her life cut short, but it's her music in all its glory that lives on – and surely that's what she herself would have wanted. **G** This month, Warner Classics releases 'Jacqueline du Pré Rarities: Live Recordings 1963-1971' (462 7787) – a three-CD set of rare radio broadcasts, to be reviewed in a future issue of Gramophone

#### CLASSIC DU PRÉ RECORDINGS

In the studio or live, du Pré's charisma shines through



**Elgar: Cello Concerto** 

Jacqueline du Pré vc LSO / Sir John Barbirolli EMI M 623 0752 (12/65<sup>R</sup>)

Fifty years on, the recording that sealed du Pré's reputation as a pioneer of the Elgar Cello Concerto remains as visceral

and heartfelt as ever. 'It is a totally committed performance,' wrote Trevor Harvey in his review. 'And though every phrase is perfection, the interpretation is strong in its overall conception of each movement.'



Beethoven: Cello Sonatas Nos 3 & 5

Jacqueline du Pré vc Stephen Bishop pfEMI Gemini (\$) (2) 350 8072 (9/66<sup>R</sup>)

The Fifth Sonata was a highlight of du Pré and Kovacevich's Royal Festival Hall concert a month before the recording,

and represents superbly their flourishing partnership. According to critic John Borwick, 'Their playing has a youthful zest and freshness about it'.



Brahms: Cello Sonatas Nos 1 & 2

Jacqueline du Pré vc Daniel Barenboim pf EMI Gemini (\$) (2) 586 2332 (12/68<sup>R</sup>)

These Brahms sonatas exhibit playing that is, according to Joan Chissell, 'quite extraordinarily expressive and

beautiful'. Are the tempos and rhythms too self-indulgent to be authentically Brahmsian? Perhaps, but this recording is still legendary.



Pinchas Zukerman vn Jacqueline du Pré vc New Philharmonia Orchestra / Daniel Barenboim pf Film director Christopher Nupen

BBC/Opus Arte/Allegro Films (F) 22 OACNO902D (9/04)

This contains two films, Jacqueline du Pré and the Elgar Cello Concerto and The Ghost (a performance of Beethoven's Ghost Trio). The former is noteworthy for its complete filmed performance of the Elgar with Barenboim conducting. As Edward Greenfield wrote.

'[It] has a warmth and intensity to match...du Pré's classic EMI recording.'



du Pré 🔯 Elgar: Cello Concerto

Jacqueline du Pré vc BBC SO / Sir John Barbirolli Testament (F) SBT1388 (2/06)

Recorded live in Prague in 1967, little more than a year after her classic studio recording, du Pré clearly

revels being in front of an audience. As Andrew Farach-Colton noted, 'She digs into the opening solo with startling urgency...[and] finds a greater variety of mood in the score.'



Jacqueline du Pré: A Celebration

Jacqueline du Pré vc with various artists

Film director Christopher Nupen

Allegro Films (F) 22 AO7CND (10/07)

Christopher Nupen's three-hour tribute features two films plus a montage of images of du Pré and Barenboim

accompanied by a recording of them playing the first movement of the Brahms E minor Cello Sonata. To conclude is an interview with du Pré, shot in 1980, which, as Andrew Farach-Colton wrote, 'is all the more potent for being entirely free of self-pity'.

**GRAMOPHONE FEBRUARY 2015 15** gramophone.co.uk

# Du Pré became a goddess, an ideal towards which to strive'

Steven Isserlis first encountered Jacqueline du Pré's Elgar recording as a young boy, and it touched him deeply. Several decades on, and having just recorded the concerto himself for the second time, he dares to listen to this landmark interpretation once more

t must have been around my seventh birthday - just over a year after I'd started playing the cello – that I walked into the cosy living room of my first teacher, Mrs Pringle, and she pointed at her armchair, on which a large object was gleaming invitingly. It was obviously a major moment for me, since I still remember looking at the object, and realising with a leap of the heart that it was Jacqueline du Pré's new recording of the Elgar concerto, conducted by Sir John Barbirolli. (On the other side of the record, of course, was Janet Baker's classic recording of Elgar's Sea Pictures; to my eternal shame, I didn't listen to that for years - typical blinkered cellist.) I need hardly say how the recording affected me when I took it home and rushed to the gramophone to play it. Du Pré became for me - as for so many others of my generation - an inspiring goddess, an ideal

towards which to strive. Later, of course, the recording took on a far more tragic significance, as this warm-hearted, lovable, unbelievably talented musician was struck down, first by the stress of her life, and then by the terrible disease that slowly killed her. I got to meet her a few times during her illness, most notably on the two occasions on which I went to her house to play for her. The first time, I took the Brahms E minor Sonata. Her approach to it was so different from that with which I'd been brought up that I found it hard to incorporate her ideas – even though I'm sure that all her criticisms (chiefly that I was underplaying it) were quite justified. But the second time, I took with me a Khachaturian solo sonata that I had to learn in a hurry. Already well beyond any hope of playing again, she was fascinated by this work, which she'd never come across, and gave me a wonderful lesson on it. Furthermore, with typical



Listening afresh: Isserlis falls in love with du Pré's Elgar all over again

'I knew I couldn't write this until my recording was finished, or else I would have started unconsciously to imitate hers'

generosity, she kept me there for around two and a half hours, playing records and chatting about all things musical. It was a great experience.

Thereafter, I used to see her at the occasional concert. Despite her ever-worsening condition, she never lost interest in music or the cello. I remember once giving a recital at Wigmore Hall, and being distracted as I played by some movement at the far end of the room. With a shock, I realised that it was du Pré, flailing uncontrollably.

I was staying with the great Russian cellist Raya Garbousova when the news of Jacqueline's death was announced. We mourned her together – not her death so much as the cruel last years of her life.

With all this history, it is hard to distance oneself enough to come up with an objective assessment of her recording with Barbirolli – but that is what I have been asked to do.

Before I do so, however, I should point out that there is no way I can be truly objective. I have my own strong views on the work, which by necessity are going to be very different from du Pré's, or from anyone else's. This has to be true of any performer – otherwise there would be no point in us all playing the concerto! In fact, I was making a new recording of the concerto just last week, due for release on Hyperion later this year, and one of my conditions for agreeing to write this was that I wouldn't be able to start on it until that was finished. I knew that if I listened to du Pré's version before our sessions, I would start unconsciously to imitate aspects of it, which would have sounded false.

But with that recording safely wrapped up, I have now listened to du Pré's recording – for the first time in many years. The first thing to say is that I love it. The second thing to say is that it is very different from what I remembered or expected.

16 GRAMOPHONE FEBRUARY 2015 gramophone.co.uk

My image of du Pré is of a flamboyant performer, playing as if her whole life was being expressed in every note she played. Having listened to her recording with Barbirolli, I then sampled one of her later performances of the Elgar on YouTube which corresponded far more closely to my memory of the live and televised performances of hers that I remember. What I noticed particularly on the recording with Barbirolli was the restraint – and the close adherence to the composer's markings. The only recording that I did listen to (once) before I myself recorded the concerto again was one of Beatrice Harrison's, with Elgar conducting. Curiously, Harrison pays far less attention to Elgar's markings than du Pré does! It's an interesting question: which represents the composer's intentions better, the written score or the composer's own performance? I would say that, while one must of course listen to a composer's recording, the score is more important. Elgar's score has a marking over almost every note – and the markings all make perfect sense. (The Violin Concerto seems to me over-marked; not the Cello Concerto, though.) Obviously Elgar loved Harrison's performance: 'Give it 'em Beatrice, give it 'em. Don't mind about the notes or anything,' he urged her – and give it to us she does! (And the notes are there, too, by the way.) But it is just an interpretation, even with the composer conducting; and what Elgar enjoyed from a performer as charismatic and convincing as Harrison, he might not have tolerated from another. All the markings in the cello part, including the bowings, were painstakingly worked out by the ex-violinist Elgar with the concerto's first performer, the great cellist Felix Salmond. (Salmond got a very raw deal when the premiere was sabotaged by the conductor Albert Coates, who poached most of the rehearsal time for his part of the programme. It is sad that Salmond never recorded the concerto - that would have been fascinating.)

So it is wonderful to hear du Pré and Barbirolli give a performance so closely allied to the score. Some moments seem almost too restrained - the wonderfully marked mf dolcissimo in the first movement, for instance, is played piano. But even that is refreshing in its modesty - it chimes in somehow with Gramophone reviewer Edward Greenfield's memory of du Pré going out herself to get some aspirins after the sessions, it never occurring to her that someone might go and get them for her. One very interesting departure from the score obviously came from Barbirolli (whose relationship with the work stretched back to its first performance by Salmond and Elgar, at which he was one of the tutti cellists). At the recapitulation of the finale, the score is marked both *Tempo 1* and *Nobilmente*. Barbirolli clearly favours the nobilmente marking, taking the entire tutti at a tempo far slower than the original one. I don't think it's necessary - but, in Barbirolli's hands, it works.

Cellistically, du Pré's performance is wholly admirable. Her *spiccato* at the beginning of the second movement, for instance, is amazingly light and airborne. There are occasional reminders that recordings were less heavily edited then than they tend to be now: she often opts for 'safe' fingerings in a way that I doubt she would have in live performance; and soloist and orchestra lose each other very briefly in the *allegro molto* of the final movement. But all that matters about as much as specks of dust on a great painting.

I wonder what she herself would have thought of this recording had she been around today, in her 70th year. I suspect that she would have loved it. Of course, she would have changed and developed massively over the intervening 50 years; but then again, perhaps she would have returned to something of the introversion of this early approach? Tragically, we shall never know. **6** 



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# INNOVATION CAUDACITY

A century since Scriabin's death, Geoffrey Norris says we should look beyond the composer's egomania to marvel at a remarkable musical legacy

hen Alexander Scriabin died in 1915, nobody could have been more surprised than he was. Mere death was not part of his life plan. During his last decade he had been envisaging something far more apocalyptic, whereby the whole of humanity, intoxicated by his music and mesmerised by his God-like magnetism and omnipotence, would join him in the Mysterium, an act of ecstatic transcendence to a higher plane of existence. Set against such ambitious plans, the blood poisoning that actually killed him when complications set in

with a carbuncle on his lip seems somewhat humdrum. But it is all too easy to mock Scriabin for his self-deluded beliefs in his Messianic calling. The fact is that the weird workings of his mind generated music that possesses and transmits emotional rapture and a consuming, hypnotic energy which, if not exactly signalling the dawn of a Day of Judgement, does have the power to envelop the listener in a voluptuous world of spellbinding, life-affirming, sensuous sound.

Scriabin's personality was a bizarre blend of the pragmatic and the preposterous. To read the letters he sent home to Moscow while away on his extensive tours as a concert pianist, he comes across as someone with close, affectionate family ties and with a down-to-earth approach to the day-to-day arrangements of his schedule and travel, at the same time enthusiastically conveying information about the music he is working on. Then you turn to his private notebooks and find him declaring enigmatically, 'I am come to tell you the secret of life, the secret of death, the secret of heaven and earth'; 'The whole world is inundated with the waves of my being.'



Scriabin in 1909, the year he composed Prometheus

In the Moscow apartment that he rented for the last three years of his life there are similar clues to the dichotomy of his character. Established as a house museum as long ago as 1922, this first-floor flat at No 11 Bol'shoy Nikolopeskovsky pereulok – a small side street running between the old Arbat and the new – exhales the very breath of Scriabin, and, to judge from a guidebook published in 1925, is still very much as it was a century ago, a haven now of civilisation amid the tourist tat and adverts for tattoo parlours that have come to despoil the once-elegant Arbat area.

On the practical side, the flat contains

two grand pianos (a Bechstein and a Becker), together with furniture and fittings revealing an aesthete's taste for what in Russia is called *stil' modern* (or Art Nouveau) and other general pointers to an early-20th-century man of culture. The telephone apparatus still displays Scriabin's local number: 3-36-30. Then your eye is caught by various Indian and Eastern trinkets and by a strangely haunting picture entitled *The Oriental Sage* by Nikolay Shperling, the artist who is said to have drunk blood and eaten human flesh as an aid to mystical experience.

On a table in the study there is a circular board supporting a ring of coloured light bulbs with a row of bell-pushes alongside it. It looks like something you might have knocked up in the garage, but in reality it is a device that is hugely significant apropos of Scriabin's later music: this is nothing less than a domestic version (created for Scriabin by the physicist Alexander Mozer) of the *clavier à lumières* ('keyboard of lights') for which Scriabin specifically wrote a part in his last-completed orchestral work, *Prometheus: The Poem of Fire*. Although it is



Scriabin (seated, left) with his teacher Zverev (seated, centre) and fellow pupil Rachmaninov (standing, centre right)

unlikely that Scriabin actually experienced synaesthesia, he did associate certain keys with certain colours, as did Rimsky-Korsakov, although the two composers disagreed about which key went with which colour. Each of the bell-pushes on the Mozer gadget is labelled with a note of the chromatic scale. Press one of them, and a light comes on: red for C, yellow for D, green for A and so on. It is a somewhat crude representation of what Scriabin visualised for performances of *Prometheus*, in which the auditorium would be bathed in colours or combinations of shades appropriate to the music's tonality, ending the piece in a blaze of F-sharp-major blue. But it would have been an effective expedient for home use: it is said that Scriabin was in the habit of playing *Prometheus* on the piano

while Tatyana Schlözer, his second wife, worked the lights.

Mystical experiences, flickers of light, leanings towards the exotic and the esoteric - these are all indicators of the path Scriabin was following in his later years towards the potentially cataclysmic Mysterium. With his untimely death, Scriabin never got beyond making copious sketches for the so-called Prefatory Action, a sort of rehearsal for the final stage when spectators and participants were to be summoned by bells to the foothills of the Himalayas to witness a synthesis of all the senses and every discipline of art, with music, movement, perfumes, incense and poetry (Scriabin's own) all called into play and, of course, with Scriabin himself at the piano as the central deity.

(Alexander Nemtin made a three-hour-long reconstruction of the *Prefatory Action* from Scriabin's surviving material, with Ashkenazy conducting the Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester, Berlin, reviewed in April 2000.) Even listening to *Prometheus*, though, we can get a fair idea of the volatile, questing, harmonically fluid language that both the *Prefatory Action* and the *Mysterium* would adopt, but, looking back to his earliest works, one of the fascinating aspects of Scriabin's music is the speed with which his style developed in so distinctly radical a manner. Listen to the stately paean to Art at the end of the First Symphony (1899-1900) or to the pomp-and-circumstance march that forms the fifth movement of the Second (1901) and then compare them with the sulphurous

swirls of *Prometheus*, completed only a decade later: they are scarcely recognisable as being by the same composer. Something had obviously happened in the interim.

Not that Scriabin was all that conformist as a student. At the Moscow Conservatoire he was a classmate of Rachmaninov. They shared teachers (Arensky, Taneyev, Zverev); they were both marked out as phenomenal pianists; they were both due to graduate in composition in the same year, 1892. But, whereas Rachmaninov fulfilled the examination requirement by completing a one-act opera - Aleko, based on Pushkin's poem The Gypsies - Scriabin failed even to make a start on it. He left the



Alexander Scriabin with his second wife, Tatyana Schlözer, on the banks of the Oka River in Central Russia

Conservatoire without a composition diploma, but, even so, some of his early compositions were taken on by the publishing house of Jurgenson. Soon, Scriabin came under the beneficent wing of the wealthy industrialist, Mitrofan Belyayev, under whose imprint most of Scriabin's music was to see the light of day.

His earliest works, exclusively for piano, have often been equated with Chopin's. True, the fact that Scriabin wrote waltzes, preludes, études, mazurkas and impromptus invites a superficial comparison with Chopin, as does Scriabin's delicacy of texture. But the harmonic vocabulary is riper and less firmly harnessed than anything Chopin might have conceived, and, as Yevgeny Sudbin says, there are 'darker undertones' in Scriabin's music, sometimes with 'the Devil in the background'.

Sudbin is today one of the most compelling and discerning interpreters of Scriabin's piano music, as is evinced by his recording of the Second, Fifth and Ninth Sonatas within a shrewd context of études, mazurkas and other shorter pieces (12/07), and by his recent recording of the Piano Concerto (to be reviewed next month). The latter, completed in 1897, has never really been as central to the repertoire as Rachmaninov's concertos or, indeed, some of Scriabin's purely orchestral works such as The Divine Poem (1902-4) or The Poem of Ecstasy (1905-8). Since the concerto has long been one of my favourite works, I have always found this hard to understand, but Sudbin says that it is a score that poses a lot of questions. While clearly still rooted in Romantic soil (as the 'big tune' in the finale attests), the relationship and coordination between piano and orchestra often triggers problems: the music's flexibility, its give and take of rhythm, its fleeting ideas require both instinct and rehearsal to allow them to become airborne. At the same time, the orchestration is sometimes – particularly in the finale – too weighty for the piano to combat, something that can perhaps be resolved more easily in the recording studio than in the concert hall. Rimsky-Korsakov, by no means averse to Scriabin in general (dubbing him a 'star of the first magnitude', but also 'warped, posing and conceited'), heavily criticised the concerto's scoring: 'Look at this filth', he wrote privately to Lyadov. 'It would be much better if the composer were to write the concerto for two pianos and then let someone else orchestrate it.'

Molly-coddled from childhood, Scriabin was unaccustomed to criticism. He was always one to follow his own impulses and preferences, particularly so as the 19th century turned into the 20th and his self-obsession became ever more pronounced. Scriabin was born on Christmas Day 1 871 by the Julian calendar then still in force in Russia (the Western, Gregorian, equivalent is January 6, 1872). As time went on and his egomania intensified, sharing a birthday with Jesus Christ helped both to fuel and, in his own mind, to corroborate his Messianic aspirations. The fact that he was buried at Eastertide would doubtless have added grist to the mill, had Scriabin been alive to know.

Dabbling in the religious philosophy of Sergey Nikolayevich Trubetskoy as well as the writings of Nietzsche and the theosophical teachings of Madame Blavatsky, he became ever more egocentric in his thinking, seeing himself not just as a mere composer but as a figure of world-changing stature and consequence. Hence the inexorable progress towards the *Mysterium*. But, however much Scriabin's musical creativity was driven by his largely impenetrable philosophical musings, it is by no means essential to join him on his mystic journey in order to appreciate the works themselves. Scriabin penned an abstruse poetic equivalent to *The Poem of Ecstasy* (his Fourth Symphony, completed in 1908), but it is perfectly possible to bask in the



The Boston Music edition of Scriabin's Six Etudes

rich mix of colours, to bathe in the liquid harmonies and to be buoyed up by the music's terrific upsurges of energy without giving Scriabin's verse a second, or even a first, glance.

Similarly, from the Fifth Piano Sonata (1907) onwards, Scriabin started using nonstandard expression markings: 'with fantastic intoxication' (con una ebbrezza fantastica) is the famous one from the Fifth Sonata, but, switching to

French in the later sonatas, we find 'the dream takes shape' (*le rêve prend forme*) in the Sixth, 'like lightning' (*foudroyant*) in the Seventh and 'with sad delight' (*avec une volupté douloureuse*) in the Tenth. These might give performers pause for thought, but, again, the music is so compelling in its blend of strong ideas, evanescent, weightless trills, suspended and overlapping harmonies and sheer dynamic power as to speak forcefully and eloquently for itself.

From the Sixth Sonata onwards, Scriabin chooses to abandon key signatures. They have become irrelevant, since the volatile nature of the harmony subverts any traditional tonal scheme, not least through such destabilising devices as the so-called 'mystic chord' consisting (from bottom to top) of an augmented fourth, diminished fourth, augmented fourth and two perfect

# 'Compared to Chopin, there are darker undertones in Scrabin, sometimes with the Devil in the background' – Yevgeny Sudbin

fourths (for example, C, F sharp, B flat, E, A, D). At the same time Scriabin often spreads his writing over three or four staves instead of the usual two, so complex and gymnastic have his textures become. But there is a paradox here. Where the listener might find these late works a challenge, albeit an exhilarating one, the experienced performer can see reason. Yevgeny Sudbin remarks that 'from a practical point of view the later works are more logical [than the earlier ones]. The Ninth Sonata might at times sound quite chaotic, but it's actually almost like a Beethoven sonata in that every note falls into place. Later Scriabin is significantly easier to understand and perform.' So, for all the unfathomable philosophising and self-centred posturing, Scriabin's actual technical craft became more finely honed as he went along rather than being etiolated through his mystical ruminations.

One can't help but wonder what would have happened to Scriabin had he lived beyond 1915 and the age of 43. In 1921, Anatoly Lunacharsky, the enlightened post-1917 Commissar of Education and the Arts in Soviet Russia, said that he 'could weep tears of blood' that Scriabin had not lived to celebrate the Revolution, since his music seemed such a portent of social upheaval. Scriabin had clearly had a different sort of revolution in mind, and his ideas divided opinion. In the 1930s Shostakovich voiced the hard-line view that Scriabin was 'our bitter musical enemy', his music tending towards 'unhealthy eroticism...mysticism, passivity and a flight from the reality of life', though, in one of those quirks of fate that are dotted throughout Soviet music history, Shostakovich found himself chairman of the Scriabin Centenary Committee in 1972.

The critic Leonid Sabaneyev published a study of Scriabin as early as 1916 together with a book of reminiscences in 1925. An edition of Scriabin's letters appeared in 1965. And, whatever the political temperature, his music found ready champions, starting with the pianist Vladimir Sofronitsky (1901-61), who married one of Scriabin's daughters, Elena. *Prometheus* – together with Scriabin playing his own Piano Concerto – was first heard in London as early as 1913 under Sir Henry Wood, since when Scriabin's music has never really been off the radar: it is just that sometimes its exposure is greater than at others.

On disc there have been notable sets of the orchestral works from Svetlanov in the 1960s and 1996, Ashkenazy in the 1990s and Muti in 2001, and there has never been any shortage of persuasive interpreters of the piano works, from Richter and Igor Zhukov through to today's Sudbin and Garrick Ohlsson. If we might ridicule Scriabin for his personal foibles, he did say something significant in a piece of verse associated with the Fifth Sonata: 'I bring you Audacity!' Audacity: that's a word that succinctly sums up Scriabin's creativity, and a quality we can marvel at during this centenary year. **6** 

#### SCRIABIN ON RECORD

Four discs revealing the sheer range of Scriabin's invention



Scriabin:
The Composer
as Pianist
Alexander Scriabin pf
Pierian (M) (D)

0018 (6/04)

Worth seeking out as an example of Scriabin's interpretations of nine of his own early works, albeit through the medium of piano rolls from 1910. Malleability of rhythm and fiery spontaneity coalesce in a thoroughly personal style of playing.



Symphonies
Russian Federation
SO / Evgeny
Svetlanov

Warner Classics ® 3

5101 14508-2 (5/07)

Recorded in 1996, this compendium of Symphonies Nos 1 and 2, *The Divine Poem, The Poem of Ecstasy, Prometheus* and the early *Rêverie* captures all the luminescence, impulsive power, fluidity and shimmering mystique of Scriabin's orchestral scores.



Piano Concerto Yevgeny Sudbin pf Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra / Andrew Litton

BIS (F) 🥮 BIS2088

By contrast to some other interpretations which try to anchor Scriabin's Piano Concerto to Romantic norms, Sudbin allows it the freedom to take wing, to flutter, to dance and to reveal its thorough individuality.



Piano Sonatas Nos
1-10. Four Pieces.
Quatre Morceaux.
Deux Danses.
Deux Poèmes

Vladimir Ashkenazy pf Decca (B) (2) 452 9612

There are other, more striking interpretations of certain individual sonatas but, for an overall view of the development of Scriabin's vision from the First Sonata to the Tenth, this Ashkenazy set is invaluable.

HOTOGRAPHY: DEAGOSTINI/GETTY IMAGES

# CHANDOS New Releases



#### Disc of the Month Sir Edward Elgar

Scenes from the Saga of King Olaf/The Banner of Saint George

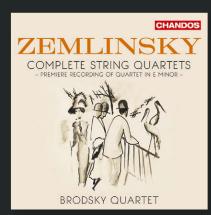
After having recorded The Dream of Gerontius ('Recording of the Month' in BBC Music), Sir Andrew Davis now turns to two of Elgar's most popular early choral works: Scenes from the Saga of King Olaf and The Banner of Saint George. The recording was made soon after a successful performance, featuring the same 'excellent Bergen Philharmonic' and 'outstanding vocal forces': the 'imposing' baritone Alan Opie, the 'high, incisive tenor' Barry Banks, singing 'fearlessly in some quite challenging passages', and the American soprano Emily Birsan, who sang 'with radiant delicacy' (The Daily Telegraph).



#### Mendelssohn in Birmingham

Vol. 3

This is the third recording in our Mendelssohn in Birmingham series, with the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra and its Principal Guest Conductor, Edward Gardner. It features Calm Sea and Prosperous Voyage and Symphony No. 2 'Hymn of Praise', completing our survey of Mendelssohn's mature symphonies.



#### Zemlinsky Complete String Ouartets

In this recording of Zemlinsky's complete String Quartets which includes the premiere recording of String Quartet in E Minor, the Brodsky Quartet brings fresh life to the works, with a spirit so transformational you felt they were actually improving the world', as The Strad reported after a recent concert performance.

CHAN 10845(2)



#### Choir of St John's College, Cambridge O Sacrum Convivium!

This new disc with the Choir of St John's College, Cambridge under Andrew Nethsingha pays homage to French sacred choral music of the early twentieth century. It features two Messes solennelles, by Louis Vierne and Jean Langlais, and pieces by Francis Poulenc and Olivier Messiaen. CHAN 10842



#### Tempesta di Mare Comédie et Tragédie, Vol. 1

This is Vol. 1 of Tempesta di Mare's two-disc project of French baroque instrumental music written for the theatre. The period instrument ensemble was recently praised by the magazine Fanfare for its 'abundant energy, immaculate ensemble, impeccable intonation, and undeniable sense of purpose'.

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Paris's new concert hall, the Philharmonie de Paris, has not been without its controversies but there are high hopes that it can reach the audiences of tomorrow. Martin Cullingford pays a visit

odern architecture stretches out before me, a forest of right angles, apartment lights glimmering in the gloaming. Far beyond, like tiny Impressionist daubs of orange oil, the Eiffel Tower and the dome of Les Invalides shimmer. That's all there is to tell me it's Paris. Not a Haussmann boulevard in sight.

Even so, there's a certain drama to the view from this terrace, 37 metres high, with the Parc de la Villette – a collection of cultural and educational organisations built in the city's old abattoir area – to one side, and the roaring

artery of the Périphérique, Paris's ring road, to the other. And for Parisians, by the time they read this article, it's a terrace that will be all theirs.

I'm standing on top of the Philharmonie de Paris, architect Jean Nouvel's imaginative new addition to a city that has a proud tradition of creating something of a frisson by injecting architectural audacity where you least expect it. Think of the glass pyramid in the courtyard of the Louvre, or the Centre Georges Pompidou near Les Halles.

Even so, there are rules to follow. The mention of 37 metres wasn't a mere piece of journalistic pedantry: that's the absolute limit to which you can today build in central Paris (an obvious exception from the 1970s, the Tour Montparnasse, was the reason the rule was introduced).

The terrace sits atop an organic, sweeping sculptural structure (no right angles here!), and it's possible to reach it by climbing steps which criss-cross the building's sloping exterior. It's an effective embodiment of the vision of Laurent Bayle, the President of the Philharmonie de Paris, to integrate the city's new concert hall fully into the world around it. What better way to dispel any sense of barriers to access, than to let people walk right on up and over it?



'To embrace the people living beyond the core of Paris, you need to talk to them, to develop a new cultural field' - Laurent Bayle

Bayle, the man who has led the project to build the hall, tells me of recent research which found that whereas in the last 20 years the average age of audiences for theatre and dance has become only four years older, for classical music that figure is 12 years. Furthermore, in common with most modern cities, property in Paris is increasingly becoming out of reach for the younger audiences that classical music needs to attract. The current concert halls - such as the Salle Plevel on Rue du Faubourg Saint-Honoré (also home to the Élysée Palace and the British Embassy), and even the new

Radio France hall – are all in the centre and western side of the city. The new Philharmonie is right up in the north-east corner of the city, where housing is cheaper and closer to the areas in which, Bayle argues, the audiences of tomorrow will be living.

Paris's ring road is also, he suggests, a 'terrible barrier', a division between those inside and those outside. But with more people forced to live on the outside it's a barrier that needs to become permeable. And so, by placing Paris's state-of-the-art epicentre of music-making among those new audiences – still inside the Périphérique yet directly alongside it – Bayle hopes to secure a classical audience for the future.

It all chimes with the Grand Paris initiative, launched by then President Nicolas Sarkozy in 2007 and encompassing both architecture and transport, in that it focuses on the development and integration of Paris beyond its core, beyond the Périphérique. But to truly embrace the people living in these areas, Bayle says, you need to 'talk to them, to develop a new cultural field'. Which is what he hopes the Philharmonie will do.

Location isn't everything of course; once you're there, it's what's inside that counts. Before you even get to the building, simply stepping inside the Parc places you among some significant Parisian cultural highlights, including the

Striking billboard: a large wall juts out of Nouvel's vast structure, projecting concert details to passing traffic; it's 'an outstretched hand to the communities outside'

Cité de la Musique, opened in 1995 and encompassing a 1000-seat concert hall (home of Ensemble Intercontemporain) and one of the world's leading musical instrument collections. Once in the building itself, you'll encounter a substantial exhibition space (opening with a transfer of the V&A's David Bowie exhibition), education and workshop rooms, and 15 rehearsal rooms including one with space for a full orchestra as well as 250 spectators. And then, of course, there's the auditorium itself. At the time of my visit chairs and organ pipes were still being

installed, and walking around the stage involved a few tentative strides along planks perched over large drops. (Are you sure you'll be ready for the opening on January 14, I ask? 'No doubts' came the response). But there was a sense that it could strike the balance between dramatic scale and visual engagement which is the hallmark of any modern hall. At 2400 seats it compares to recent major auditoria, but where Bayle is confident it has the edge is in the relationship between musicians and audiences: at the Berlin Philharmonie, he tells me, the furthest audience member is 40 metres from the conductor, at LA's Walt Disney Hall it's 45 metres - here it's 32 metres. This has been achieved by detaching the balconies from the wall and tilting them towards the stage; access is via gangways. That's not all they've detached either: the balcony behind the stage can vanish behind the back wall, and the seats in front of the stage can disappear into the floor beneath, allowing the venue to be used for more informal concerts and events. Acoustics are in the hands of Harold Marshall and Yasuhisa Toyota (whose name is attached to many of the most recent successful new halls); January will reveal whether these achieve expectations.

As for what will fill the hall during the week, programming and events will be more traditional – the kind of music, soloists and ensembles, including the resident Orchestre de Paris, that you might currently find at the Salle Pleyel – with a few important tweaks to ticket pricing (cheaper) and timing (later). During the weekend, programming will target younger audiences and families, integrating more accessible or themed concerts with workshops and exhibitions. Bayle says his inspiration lies in the Pompidou Centre, which opened in 1977, where the mix of art, libraries and films, housed in inspiring architecture, changed perceptions of what such an institution could be.



Memorable exterior: the tiles are shaped like flying birds

You don't even have to visit the hall in person. At **live.philharmoniedeparis.fr** you'll find free video broadcasts of concerts and an impressive archive. Under the previous Cité de la Musique brand between 50 and 80 concerts per season were offered, and the new site also promises an online magazine, reference material and a 'personal space for users'.

If all the above sounds promising, the hall has certainly not been without its controversy. For a start, there's the €386m cost, which has earned the hall the dubious honour in the current

economic climate of being one of the world's most expensive. Then there's the location itself, which has not found favour with Paris's traditional concert-goers, who are more likely to live in the centre or west of the city. But the shifting of the centre of gravity of Parisian musical life might have been less controversial if it wasn't also for the decision to stop hosting any classical concerts at the Salle Pleyel, which was bought by Cité de la Musique in 2009. Protests and a petition attracting upwards of 10,000 signatures give some hint of the Salle Pleyel's audience's feelings about the step.

Whether this generates disharmony and division within the Paris concert-going scene, and how successful the new Philharmonie will be, only time will tell. To return to Bayle's inspiration, on a freezing December day there were queues outside the Pompidou Centre stretching back across the vast square outside (so I dived instead into the fascinating – and warm – re-creation of Brancusi's studio). But then that's in the centre of Paris. Though if Bayle's predicted demographic shift and the Grand Paris plans for the wider city all come to fruition, that eventually might not be such an important factor.

But one thing is for certain – any settled rules of Parisian musical life are about to be bent, if not broken. Then again, perhaps rules always should be challenged. While you can't build above 37 metres in Paris, it turns out you *can* add another 15 metres if it isn't used for any activity. And so above Jean Nouvel's terrace a large wall, jutting out across the Périphérique and towards the suburbs beyond, reaches a height of 52 metres. With images and concert details projected onto it, it makes a marvellous billboard for passing traffic; more poetically, Bayle describes it as 'an outstretched hand to the communities outside'. Let's hope it's one they grasp. **©** 

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#### **Editor's Choice**

Martin Cullingford's pick of the finest recordings reviewed in

# Recording of the Month

Harriet Smith is enthralled by an all-too-rare Bach disc from Polish pianist Piotr Anderszewski



English Suites - No 1, BWV806; No 3, BWV808: No 5, BWV810 Piotr Anderszewski pf

Warner Classics (F) 2564 62193-9 (67' • DDD)

This is a glorious disc. Simply glorious. Anderszewski and Bach have long been congenial bedfellows and the Pole's playing here is compelling on many different levels. To start with, there's the sense of sharing the sheer physical thrill of Bach's keyboard-writing. This is particularly evident in faster movements such as the fierce and brilliant fugal Gigue that concludes the Third Suite, or, in the E minor Fifth Suite, the extended fugal Prelude and the outer sections of its Passepied I. Common to all is a sense of being fleet but never breathless, with time enough for textures to tell.

At every turn you get the sense of Bach flexing his compositional muscles in these early keyboard suites. There is of course nothing innately 'English' about them and the origin of their title is shrouded in mystery, though Bach's earliest biographer Johann Nikolaus Forkel speculated that it reflected the nationality of the suites' (unknown) dedicatee. As with the keyboard partitas (of which Anderszewski so memorably recorded the First, Third and Sixth for Virgin Classics back in 2001 - 1/03), there's a sense of Bach demonstrating just how much



At every turn, Piotr Anderszewski harnesses the possibilities of the piano in the service of Bach; the result is a clear labour of love'

variety he could introduce into a suite built around the common elements of Prelude, Allemande, Courante, Sarabande and Gigue. In Anderszewski's hands the First, Third and Fifth very much occupy their own worlds in terms of mood. Thus there's a palpable delight in the rhythmically ungainly theme from which the Gigue of the First Suite is fashioned and Anderszewski's way with Bach's counterpoint is at once strong-jawed and supple. We're always aware of the re-entry of a fugue subject, for instance, as it peeks through the texture in different registers or reappears stood on its head, yet it's never exaggerated as is sometimes the tendency with less imaginative pianists.

And how Anderszewski can dance - at least at the keyboard - in a movement such as the Prelude of the Third Suite, urged into life through subtle dynamics, voicings, articulation and judicious ornamentation. A very different kind of dance reveals itself in the Gavotte II of the Third Suite, a musette in which he takes a more impish view than many, the sonorous drone effect contrasting delightfully with the tripping upper lines. The way he has considered the touch and dynamic of every phrase means that these are readings that constantly impress with fresh details each time you hear them.

Even the most apparently unassuming numbers, such as the Second Bourrée of the First Suite or the Passepied II of the Fifth, gain a sense of intrigue as he re-examines them from every angle, again bringing multifarious shadings to the music. And it all flows effortlessly - though I'm sure the journey has been anything but that. Highlights abound: in the murmuring Courante of the Third Suite, the Pole's reactivity leaves Maria João Pires sounding a touch unsubtle – which is really saying something. This is followed by one of the most extraordinary readings of the Sarabande I've ever heard. While Pires revels in its echoing harmonies, Anderszewski draws you daringly into his own world, as Bach's initially grandiose sonorities become more and more withdrawn. This whispered intimacy

28 GRAMOPHONE FEBRUARY 2015 gramophone.co.uk



Compelling on many levels: Piotr Anderszewski rises above some fearsome competition in his performances of three of Bach's English Suites

extends into his insertion of an ornamented version of this movement, entitled 'Les agréments de la même Sarabande', which proves a masterclass in audacious

ornamentation, yet never overburdening Bach's melodic lines. In fact the effect here is truly meditative. Fittingly, there is a long silence before the limpid Gavotte.

#### **Listening points** Your guide to the disc's memorable moments

#### Track 10: Suite No 1, Allemande - 0'00"-0'59"

How subtly Anderszewski applies his ornamentation to emphasise the conversational quality of Bach's lines, while his subtle pedalling gives the murmuring counterpoint a haloed quality.

#### Track 17: Suite No 1, Gigue - 0'00"-1'31"

Anderszewski takes this ugly duckling of a theme and proceeds to point up its rhythmic inelegance with great glee. When it reappears upside-down you're made aware of it but the effect is always subtle. And listen out for the delicious rising left-hand phrase at 1'11".

#### Track 4: Suite No 3, Sarabande - 0'54"-2'21"

It's as if the music is folding in on itself, as

Anderszewski withdraws more and more, to intoxicatingly rapt effect.

#### Track 18: Suite No 5, Prelude - 2'39"-4'07"

An example of the pianist's instinctive pacing, the energy deriving from the phrasing rather than sheer speed. Listen out for a highly effective passage (from 3'23") where he points up the bass-line with a delicious staccato. And the pedal-points towards the end of this excerpt energise the music rather than weighing it down.

#### Track 23: Suite No 5, Passepied II - 0'00"-1'06"

Anderszewski revels in the glistening elegance of this movement, an effect emphasised by his ravishing ornamentation, before a return to the silvery Passepied I.

Are there any caveats? Some might find the basic pulse of the First and Fifth Sarabandes perhaps too slow. To me they work precisely because he teases so much out of each line. They have a Gouldian intensity that draws you ineluctably in without any of the Canadian's wilfulness.

You can be in no doubt of the thought that has gone into this enterprise, from Anderszewski's ordering of the courantes of the First Suite, which he explains in the booklet, to the programming of the suites themselves, opening the disc with the Third rather than the more quizzical First. And at every turn, he harnesses the possibilities of the piano in the service of Bach; the result is a clear labour of love, and one in which he shines new light on old music to mesmerising effect, all of which is captured by a warmly sympathetic recording and an engaging booklet-note by Mark Audus.

Anderszewski's CDs are all too

infrequent, so let's cherish this one. 6

# Orchestral



# Edward Seckerson listens to the latest Weinberg from Sweden:

'Such is the emotional nature of Weinberg's musical language that it's impossible not to be drawn into his confidence' ▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 43



# Guy Rickards on an orchestral celebration of Alfred Hitchcock:

'Captures all the suspense, drama and terror of what remains one of the greatest film scores ever penned' ▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 46

#### JS Bach

Oboe Concertos - BWV1053*R*; BWV1056*R*; BWV1059. Oboe d'amore Concerto, BWV1055*R*. Concerto for Oboe and Violin, BWV1060*R*. Cantata No 51 - 'Höchster, mache deine Güte' (transcr Ruiz)

Gonzalo X Ruiz ob/ob d'amore

Portland Baroque Orchestra / Monica Huggett vn Avie (E) AV2324 (67' • DDD)



Gonzalez X Ruiz and Monica Huggett apply long-established scholarly theories that

Bach must presumably have written oboe concertos, now lost, and that traces of them might be found in his harpsichord concertos because the solo parts cover a more limited range than a keyboard (so perhaps they are transcriptions of earlier concertos composed originally for other instruments). Ruiz's imagination of what authentic Bachian oboe concertos might have been like is never merely academic, thanks to his characterful oboe-playing and the Portland Baroque Orchestra's relaxed sparkle, whereby lightly jazzy personality, stylistic mastery and technical dexterity work hand in hand as equal artistic partners.

The *Presto* conclusion to a G minor adaptation of a harpsichord concerto (F minor, BWV1056) speaks with conversational ease, and pizzicato lower strings and sensuous violins form a delectable platform for lyrical oboe in the central Siciliano in an F major adaptation of another harpsichord concerto (E major, BWV1053). Ruiz uses a mellow oboe d'amore for a concerto rescored from BWV1055 (keeping the same key of A major). The double harpsichord concerto in C minor (BWV1060) is transferred with persuasive idiomaticness to oboe and violin (played by Huggett with a fine sense of chiaroscuro); but the most elaborate concerto in its editorial construction, BWV1059, uses organ-and-strings movements from the alto cantata Geist und

Seele wird verwirret (No 35), which flank a sweetly delicate Adagio lifted without alteration from Ich steh mit einem Fuss im Grabe (No 156). This is an exceptional union of scholarly curiosity and excellent musicianship. David Vickers

#### JS Bach



Orchestral Suites, BWV1066-69

Academy of Ancient Music / Richard Egarr hpd

AAM Records 

② AAMOO3 (94' • DDD)



In a note appended to this exceptional version of the Suites – performed by single

players at a lower pitch, by the way – the AAM's Music Director comes clean by admitting that the current fad for 'the faster [and more metronomically] played the better' doesn't appeal. Not for Richard Egarr the now popular principle that the last one up to the double bar-line is a sissy. Rather, he presents the Bach Suites as elevated chamber music, which is fine in my book, even though if you do happen to fancy a visit to the racecourse in this repertoire, the equally lean but more extrovert Reinhard Goebel with Music Antiqua of Cologne still serves a useful purpose. Interestingly the Speedy Gonzalez option didn't start with the period performance brigade but in the early 1950s with Fritz Reiner and the RCA Victor Symphony (now on Pristine Audio), whose versions of the Suites include some real fireballs in the dance movements.

What I like about Egarr is the way middle voices are liberated and integrated into the overall texture, while the fugal ouvertures breeze along without the dubious benefit of rocket fuel. Take the main body of the opening movement of the First Suite: busy, it's true, but light years removed from the more aggressive manner of some of its more recent rivals. The oboes, bassoon and strings intertwine easily, the sensation resembling animated conversation. The Courante wears a gentle

demeanour, the rushing figurations beneath the Forlane's main melody beautifully woven. Converging lines are clear but relatively soft-grained; and in the Third Suite, after a vigorous and rousing Ouverture, the celebrated Air really sings, Egarr's tasteful continuo aiding the bass-line in pursuit of maximum expressive subtlety. The sense of celebration extends to the Fourth Suite, where the timps are vividly captured and the limpid phrasing breathes easily. The Second and most intimate of the Suites benefits from superb solo playing, Rachel Brown never hogging the limelight, which is appropriate given that her wind-playing colleagues match her standards throughout. As to the sound, I was never aware of it until prompted to comment, which is as it should be. All in all, a feast of meaningfully understated musicianship. I loved it.

#### **Rob Cowan**

Selected comparison: Musica Antiqua Köln, Goebel (10/86<sup>R</sup>) (ARCH) 471 656-2AB8

#### **Beethoven**

Symphony No 9, 'Choral', Op 125
Kathleen Kim sop Songmi Yang mez
Yosep Kang ten Samuel Youn bass-bar
National Chorus of Korea; Seoul Motet Choir;
Anyang Civic Chorale; Seoul Philharmonic
Orchestra / Myung-Whun Chung
DG © 481 0591GH (68' • DDD)



Every culture gets the Beethoven Ninth it deserves. This is not the Ninth to pair with

A Survivor from Warsaw, as Erich Leinsdorf and Michael Gielen have done over the years, but a celebration of the symphony's place within Far Eastern culture, especially at Christmastime, when it has become emblematic of both treasured familial unity and a yearning for spiritual catharsis in lands dominated by atheism and religions which nurture a calm balance between man and nature.

30 GRAMOPHONE FEBRUARY 2015 gramophone.co.uk



Elevated chamber music: the Academy of Ancient Music and Richard Egarr slim down for their own-label recording of Bach's Orchestral Suites

From the strenuous violas at 6'30" you may hear both the literal working-out of a grand design, and the detail of a recording and interpretation that's too democratic for its own good. The strings of the Seoul Philharmonic bring a lovely, warm glow to the opening hymn; but after an uneasy gear-change (3'50") the song of the Andante drifts free of its mooring like a skiff on a boating lake. Rhetorical caesuras halt the movement's first crisis before a massive broadening announces the main climax, violas again inflating the aftermath to a parody of grief (Beethoven marks them pianissimo). Couple this with a massive chorus, full-throttle soloists, a scampering Scherzo considerably above Beethoven's metronome mark while every other tempo is below it, a Trio that broadens out at one phrase end before quickening into the next, sudden sfp dynamics and staccato/legato contrasts inserted here and there for dramatic 'interest', and you have schoolof-Mengelberg, which may or may not disconcert you but sounds distinctly odd in 2015. Peter Quantrill

## Brouwer · Koshkin · Villa-Lobos

'Havana Rio Moscow - Three Guitar Concertos' **Brouwer** Guitar Concerto No 3, 'Concerto

elegiaco' Koshkin Bergen Concerto Villa-Lobos Concerto for Guitar and Small Orchestra Stein-Erik Olsen gtr Academy of St Martin in the Fields / Terje Mikkelsen Simax (© PSC1313 (71' • DDD)



For guitarist/ composers such as these three, writing for guitar and orchestra is

always a dialectical process. On the one hand, the guitar's abundant colouristic resources find an immediate analogue in the orchestra's own; on the other, its relatively small sound (if only psychological now with the widespread use of amplification) makes the orchestra its natural enemy.

Hence the favouring of smaller orchestras and the careful handling of texture during those sections where the guitar predominates – two characteristics of Leo Brouwer's *Concerto elegiaco*, written for Julian Bream, who first performed it in 1986 with the composer conducting, and Heitor Villa-Lobos's Concerto for guitar and small orchestra, premiered by the work's dedicatee, Andrés Segovia, in 1956, also with the composer conducting.

Nikita Koshkin's third guitar concerto – written for and with the collaboration of Olsen and completed in 2007 – is, however, scored for full orchestra. And yet, despite the *Bergen Concerto* being, as Olsen puts it in an interview with the estimable Graham Wade, a 'monster-piece', the music is by the composer's own admission 'happy and fresh, quite different from my other two concertos'.

Indeed, it's an attractive, beautifully crafted work, with a final-movement Polka of tremendous vitality that gives both soloist and orchestra a thorough workout. Here, as in the shorter, smaller-scale concertos that precede it, Olsen's customary thoughtful, lapidary playing is perfectly complemented by a very much on-form ASMF under the Norwegian conductor Terje Mikkelsen, the whole vividly captured by Simon Kiln and Arne Akselberg in the Abbey Road Studios.

William Yeoman

#### Dvořák

Symphonies - No 4, Op 13 B41; No 8, Op 88 B163 Nuremberg State Philharmonic Orchestra / Marcus Bosch

Coviello 🖲 🥌 COV91412 (73' • DDD/DSD) Recorded live at the Meistersingerhalle, Nuremberg, February 12-15, 2014



Marcus Bosch is at his best in the lyrical second subject of the Fourth Symphony's

finale, which has something of a Brucknerian aura about it. The *Scherzo*, however, although spirited, is a little bland, the *pizzicato* underpinning of the principal theme less distinct than it might have been. Commentators tend to align the Third rather than the Fourth Symphony with Wagner but in this performance the opening of the Fourth's *Andante* second movement wears its Wagnerian pedigree very close to its sleeve.

It's a good performance, generally well played, the Eighth likewise, though needless to say here the competition hots up a great deal. When reviewing José Serebrier's generally superior version I cited Manfred Honeck as the current CD gold standard and I've yet to hear a modern version that dissuades me from that standpoint. Beyond the slow opening, Bosch cues a vigorous Allegro con brio with a refreshing lack of disruptive rallentandos (always a temptation in this movement), though in the fast coda the orchestra sounds as if it's straining to keep up (the brass especially, at around 8'33"). The Adagio is almost there, sensitive in part but a little tentative (more in mood than in execution), the Allegretto grazioso third movement relatively swift and with no easing of tempo for the Trio. Here, as in parts of the first movement, the flutes (ie at 7'31") shine through nicely, though downward string figurations are barely audible. As to the finale, again pretty good, though the martial, drum-and-fifestyle strings accompaniment at around 3'02" is indistinct.

Were the market less crowded than it is I could grant this CD a cordial welcome; but as things stand, with countless fine Eighths and Neumann (three times over), Bělohlávek and Válek in the Fourth, aside from the odd winning detail Bosch and his worthy Nuremberg State Philharmonic aren't really competitive. If you want to sample their work at its best, try their coupling of Symphonies Nos 3 and 7 (7/13), well worth investigating. Rob Cowan Sym No 8 – selected comparisons:

Pittsburgh SO, Honeck (A/14) (REFE) FR710SACD Bournemouth SO, Serebrier (12/14) (WARN) 2564 62878-7

#### **Falla**

Noches en los jardines de Españaª. El sombrero de tres picos. Fantasía Bética. El Amor brujo Luis Fernando Pérez pf

aBasque National Orchestra / Carlo Rizzi
Mirare ® MIR219 (56' • DDD)



Having recorded the piano music of his fellow countrymen Soler and Granados

(4/12), Luis Fernando Pérez now turns his attention to Spain's most original composer of the last century, Manuel de Falla. Alongside the much-recorded Nights in the Gardens of Spain, Pérez gives us the less frequently played Fantasía Bética and suites from two of Falla's popular theatre pieces. In the Fantasía, Pérez gets to the heart and soul of Falla's Andalusia - or, more pertinently, its Roman past, 'Baetica' being the Roman name for Andalusia. A pianist tackling this work requires fingers of steel to penetrate the waves of notes, as well as the poetic inclination to let the middle section, an Intermezzo, run its introspective course. Pérez articulates the percussive sounds of the Fantasía's flamenco rhythms with a pride and passion, while his Intermezzo sings as sweetly as the dolcemente marking suggests.

Falla produced his own piano versions of the three very familar excerpts from The Three-Cornered Hat. The Seguidilla flows effortlessly from Pérez, which is some feat given that the violin's lovely tune, now in octaves, is set against tremolo, pizzicato and wind filigree, all seamlessly incorporated by two hands. In the dances for the miller and his wife, Pérez catches the earthy character of this couple's fiery spirit, rooted in the soil on which they dance. He brings out the strong modal harmony in El Amor brujo, Falla's ballet-pantomime that epitomises the gypsy character, culminating in the chimes of midnight that introduce the Ritual Fire Dance.

It was an inspired idea to team Pérez up with the Basque National Orchestra, founded in 1982, under the experienced Carlo Rizzi for Nights in the Gardens of Spain. The viola line at the beginning of this interpretation is truly misteriso and the impressionistic atmosphere and continuity between soloist and orchestra never tire throughout, offering a strong visual sense of time and place. The secret grottos of the palace garden, known as the Generalife, the sounds of a lively fiesta carried on a balmy breeze in the Distant Dance, then the gypsy musicians partying in the Sierra mountains of Cordoba are presented not just as a vehicle for virtuosity but with an awareness of the music's unusual nature. The coda, one of the loveliest passages in

Falla's output, is finely drawn. A most successful disc. Adrian Edwards

#### **Gershwin · Lasser · Ravel**

'Broadway-Lafayette'

**Gershwin** Rhapsody in Blue

Lasser Piano Concerto, 'The Circle and the Child'
Ravel Piano Concerto in G

Simone Dinnerstein of MDR Leipzig Radio Symphony Orchestra / Kristjan Järvi Sony Classical ® 88875 03245-2 (69' • DDD)



Broadway-Lafayette is a New York City subway station in Manhattan, so

someone will have to explain to me its relevance to these three works for piano and orchestra. The Ravel and Gershwin open and close the disc, with the world premiere recording of Philip Lasser's Piano Concerto in the middle.

Were I hearing the Ravel G major and Rhapsody in Blue for the first time through these performances, I should count myself lucky. The sound engineering is vibrant, the acoustic focused, allowing the percussion and brass to pack a real punch, with the soloist ideally placed in the balance. Simone Dinnerstein, who has made her reputation playing Bach, proves a formidable exponent of both works, exhilarating in the outer movements of the Ravel. The slow movement has a superbly played duet with the cor anglais and is a highlight of the disc. She pays Gershwin/ Grofé the compliment of playing exactly what they wrote (for once) - except for taking the 'blues' section at bar 260 way under tempo.

Philip Lasser's Concerto, The Circle and the Child (a poetic rather than programmatic subtitle), was written specially for Dinnerstein and premiered in 2012. The composer describes it as a tribute to his 'three favourite composers and also teachers', Debussy, Bach and Schumann, and jokingly refers to the first movement as 'the piano concerto Debussy never wrote'. The second movement, 'Chorale and Child', is built on Ihr Gestirn, ihr hohen Lüfte, BWV366. The finale, 'Circles', has less distinct origins but, while it is the only one of the three to use overtly dissonant harmonies, it is no less mellow and reflective than the others: this must be one of the least virtuoso and showy piano concertos of recent years. Jeremy Nicholas

#### Haydn · Mozart

**Haydn** Sinfonia concertante, Hobl/105<sup>a</sup> **Mozart** Oboe Concerto, K314<sup>b</sup>



A pianist on Broadway: Simone Dinnerstein explores the interchange between Gershwin, Lasser and Ravel on her new album for Sony Classical

abLucas Macías Navarro ob aGuilhaume Santana bn aGregory Ahss vn Konstantin Pfiz vc Orchestra Mozart / Claudio Abbado Claves (F) 50-1302 (41' + DDD)



One definition of *Allegro aperto*, the direction in the first movement of the

Oboe Concerto, reads 'an *allegro* with broad, clear phrasing'; and broad, clear phrasing is what you get from Claudio Abbado. But he isn't as successful in equilibrating liveliness with breath and his stately tempo doesn't always appear to sit well with Lucas Macías Navarro. If he had preferred a degree of élan he gets it in the last movement, though Abbado doesn't clarify the orchestral texture as well as he might. But a meeting of minds in the *Adagio non troppo* makes many amends.

Five minds meet at every turn in the *Sinfonia concertante*, supremely crafted at every turn by Haydn (notice the soloists' entry in the first movement, not with the first subject but with the second), Abbado persuading his musicians to share his patently clear love of the work. Gentle warmth abounds in the first movement,

brass mostly stay in the background, timpani rumble. But instrumental balance, concertino vs ripieno, is as it ought to be, the Andante lyrically, even yearningly shaped. If you were expecting a finale similar in cast to the first movement, Abbado surprises with terser attack, prominent brass and betterpresent timpani. He contours this marvellous work as he feels it. It's a valid view, as is that of Frans Brüggen, whose period-instrument performance has a sharper profile. Then there's Thomas Fey, concentrated, snappy and inviting invective; but an interpretation of great distinction all the same.

#### Nalen Anthoni

Mozart – selected comparisons:

Arfken, Freiburg Baroque Orch, Von der Goltz
(10/07) (HARM) HMC90 1946

Leleux, Camerata Salzburg (5/09) (SONY) 88697 36548-2

Haydn – selected comparisons:

Orch of the 18th Century, Britiggen
(9/00) (PHIL) 462 602-2PH

#### Haydn · Kaipainen · Tomasi

Haydn Trumpet Concerto, HobVIIe/1 Kaipainen Trumpet Concerto, Op 66 Tomasi Trumpet Concerto Pasi Pirinen tpt

Heidelberg SO, Fey (11/12) (HANS) CD98 582

#### Tampere Philharmonic Orchestra / Hannu Lintu Alba (F) ABCD369 (60' • DDD)



Pasi Pirinen is the Principal Trumpet for both the Helsinki Philharmonic and

Avanti! Chamber orchestras, as well as a prize-winning soloist. His tone is bright and clear, and his playing has an easy virtuosity that reminds me of the other great Finnish trumpeter, Jouko Harjanne, though Pirinen's tone is perhaps a shade lighter. On this new release he plays two concerto standards of the repertoire, plus one he commissioned and premiered.

Kaipainen's Concerto was written for Pirinen in 2003. Its quiet opening Andante, the first of four movements, has the manner of a jazz nocturne, with nods to Miles Davis along the way. In a way it acts as a giant up-beat to the cadenza-led Allegro, which has all the elements otherwise of a first movement. The succeeding Largo quieto returns to something of the manner of the opening before the 'Neanderthal rock'n'roll' of the final Presto lets rip. It is without doubt a major addition to the repertoire.





One of the pinnacles of the repertoire and a long-held ambition: Angela Hewitt's performance of the Liszt Sonata is a revelation.

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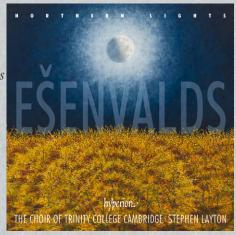
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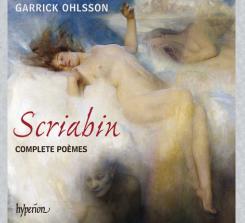
Guillaume de Machaut (cl300-1377) The dart of love THE ORLANDO CONSORT



Master pianist Garrick Oblsson performs thirty-four of Scriabin's most perfect miniatures in the composer's centenary year.

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Alexander Scriabin (1872–1915) Complete Poèmes GARRICK OHLSSON piano



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However adroitly Pirinen plays a new work such as this, the measure of his stature will always depend on how he accomplishes standard repertoire, so the performances of the Havdn and Tomasi concertos are hugely informative. The Haydn (1796) is bright and full of brilliance (certainly on a par with Harjanne's - nla - to which it is very close in tempi), the Andante's hymnlike main theme beautifully phrased. The Tomasi Concerto (1948) is more varied stylistically but Pirinen takes its shifting moods effortlessly in his stride. Superbly balanced accompaniments from the Tampere Philharmonic Orchestra under Hannu Lintu and excellent sound from Alba make this a most attractive disc. **Guv Rickards** 

#### Kabalevsky · Prokofiev

Kabalevsky Cello Concerto No 2, Op 77<sup>a</sup>. Novelette, Op 27 No 25<sup>b</sup> Prokofiev Cello Sonata. Op 119°. Cinderella - Adagio (arr Rostropovich)b. The Love for Three Oranges - March<sup>b</sup>. The Stone Flower - Waltz (both arr Limonov)b

Leonard Elschenbroich VC

<sup>c</sup>Alexei Grynyuk, <sup>b</sup>Petr Limonov pf <sup>a</sup>Netherlands Philharmonic Orchestra / Andrew Litton Onyx M ONYX4122 (68' • DDD) <sup>a</sup>Recorded live at the Concertgebouw, Amsterdam, February 22-23, 2014



Leonard Elschenbroich pulls together this unusual programme of Soviet fare with his

own intelligent and provocative bookletnote. He portrays Dmitry Kabalevsky (1904-87) as a creative voice whose cause has been hampered by his closeness to an anathematised regime. I wonder. There might be other reasons for the neglect of his Second Cello Concerto (1964). Those who know Kabalevsky through his children's pieces or The Comedians suite will be impressed by its high seriousness; the snag is that its invention is so plainly indebted to Prokofiev's Symphony-Concerto and, to a lesser degree, Shostakovich's First Cello Concerto. Those masterpieces were championed by Mstislav Rostropovich, whereas Kabalevsky was writing for Daniil Shafran, a supreme cellist who toured less. Shafran's recording, initially yoked to Evgeny Svetlanov's account of Shostakovich's Leningrad Symphony (HMV Melodiya, 12/69), was made under the composer's direction. These days you can watch them unveiling the concerto together on YouTube.

While Shafran's unrelenting intensity remains unique, there's plenty of warmth and technical assurance in this welcome newcomer, considerably more in the way of orchestral detail plus legroom for a certain wistfulness. Andrew Litton is Elschenbroich's enthusiastic collaborator who, we are assured, is 'one of the few conductors who has known this piece his whole life'. The (edited) live relay preserves the ample glow of Amsterdam's Concertgebouw and a little of the soloist's breathing in the demanding cadenzas. Applause is cut.

A 'big', not exclusively intimate take on Prokofiev's Cello Sonata (1949) is the other substantial offering, where rival options extend from the vehemence of Han-Na Chang with Sir Antonio Pappano (EMI, 5/03) to the elegant lyricism of Gautier Capuçon with Gabriela Montero (Virgin, 2/08). Given what Elschenbroich says about the composer's brand of creative escapism, a tad less resonance might have complemented the music's 'dream state' rather better even if the balance between cello and piano is well-judged.

This is an enterprising, thoroughly recommendable release from a coming star who also champions Nino Rota's rarely performed Cello Concerto No 2. Could that be next?

David Gutman

#### Khachaturian · Prokofiev

Khachaturian Piano Concerto Prokofiev Piano Concerto No 3, Op 26 Nareh Arghamanyan pf Berlin Radio Symphony Orchestra / Alain Altinoglu Pentatone (F) . 99 PTC5186 510 (67' • DDD/DSD)



Prokofiev's Third Piano Concerto has never been more popular but for

her second concerto collaboration on disc the young Armenian-born Nareh Arghamanyan has come up with a refreshingly individual take on the piece, soft-grained, spacious and full of colour. Eschewing the volcanic knockabout of Denis Matsuev, she also sidesteps the cooler nonchalance which, for me at least, makes Jean-Efflam Bavouzet's reading one of the less compelling entries in his complete cycle. Whether self-consciously bubbly or dreamily withdrawn, Arghamanyan's pointing of line is intensely individual, always super-articulate and without percussiveness. Granted, the lack of forward momentum won't please everyone - the likes of William Kapell had different priorities - but she is greatly assisted by an up-and-coming maestro who

#### GRAMOPHONE Archive

#### **Mahler's Ninth Symphony**

Three recordings that came before Chaillv's new DVD and how Gramophone rated them



#### JANUARY 1939

Mahler Symphony No 9 Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra / **Bruno Walter** 

HMV ● DB3613/22 (ten 12in • £3) This admirable recording was

made at a concert a year ago. However we choose to regard late Mahler - whether as chiefly a testament of unrest, uncertainty, selfdoubt, as a more important future-forecasting than some of our friends consider it, or even as a too poignantly coloured decadence of romance. I cannot think that so remarkable a revelation of the man's spirit at the end of his life can fail to impress any musical mind and move any open heart. WR Anderson

#### GRAMOPHONE JULY 1984



Mahler Symphony No 9 Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra / Herbert von Karajan DG (F) (2) 410 726-2GH2 Certainly this is the finest live

performance of a Mahler symphony to have appeared since Mengelberg's 1939 account of the Fourth Symphony. The digital sound on this live Berlin recording is wonderfully clear and thrillingly actual; but I am not always at ease with the conductor's-ear view of the proceedings, though of course long stretches of the score derive immense benefit from the absolute clarity and absolute quiet of the CD. Karajan's reading and the Berliners' playing of it is one of the seven wonders of the modern musical world. Richard Osborne

# GRAMOPHONE JUNE 2011

Mahler Symphony No 9 Lucerne Festival Orchestra / Claudio Abbado Accentus F ACC20214; ■ (F) 😂 ACC10214 (95' • NTSC)

This, Claudio Abbado's fourth commercial recording of the work, is even more luminous, elegant and subtly integrated than its predecessors. In some recent Abbado interpretations, the Mediterranean fluency and rapid pacing implies a hint of complacency or, at least, a reluctance to wrestle with those darker and more tumultuous corners of the score. That certainly isn't the case with this Ninth, which can only be described as unmissable. An interpretation that might seem too cool is in fact superbly gauged to provide maximal catharsis by the close.

David Gutman

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has lately conducted *The Love for Three Oranges* at the Paris Opéra. Audiophile sound helps too: her warm, deep-pile piano tone is set against an orchestral backdrop of unusual clarity and refinement.

The Prokofiev is actually placed second in physical format, something of a surprise given that Khachaturian's Piano Concerto remains deeply unfashionable (his Violin Concerto has been relatively well served in the recording studio). Those critics amenable to its populist style have tended to hold fast to classic renditions of the distant past and, in truth, Arghamanyan is not in the young Kapell's league as purveyor of blistering bravura. That said, she's no slouch either and, although the music is less tautly conceived than in 1946, Khachaturian's exotic orchestral fabric glitters more persuasively in today's higher-fi. It was apparently Alain Altinoglu's idea to replace the flexatone doubling the violin melody in the second movement with a 'whistling' musical saw. Julia Wesely's cover art is nothing if not original and there are helpfully detailed booklet-notes.

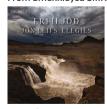
#### **David Gutman**

Selected comparison – coupled as above: Kapell, Dallas SO, Dorati, Boston SO, Koussevitzky (1/86<sup>8</sup>) (NAXO) 8 110673 Prokofiev – selected comparisons:

Bavouzet, BBC PO, Noseda (3/14) (CHAN) CHAN10802 Matsuev, Mariinsky Orch, Gergiev (4/14) (MARI) MAR0549

#### Leifs

Scherzo concreto, Op 58. Quintet, Op 50. Variazioni pastorale, Op 8. Elegies, Op 35<sup>a</sup> <sup>a</sup>Þórunn Guðmundsdóttir *mez* <sup>a</sup>Rut Ingólfsdóttir *m* <sup>a</sup>Male-Voice Choir; Reykjavík Chamber Orchestra / Bernharður Wilkinson
BIS (BIS2070 (55' • DDD)
From Smekkleysa SMK46



With this release – actually a reissue of a Smekkleysa disc from 2009 – BIS finally

completes its survey of the chamber music of Jón Leifs, following the three string quartets (7/95; ironically, Smekkleysa released their own rival CD of the quartets early last year – 5/14). A further quartet appears here, his 1937 arrangement of the delightful *Variazioni pastorale* (1920-30) in which, after a couple of conventional, mild modifications of the theme (from Beethoven's Op 8 Serenade), the real Leifs gleefully leaps out in the third variation, dominating the remaining six until the opening manner returns in the finale.

The Quintet (1960) is scored for woodwind trio (no oboe), viola and cello and epitomises the eccentric side of the composer. Its three movements are an Introduction, 'Funèbre' (perhaps in memory of his sister who died the previous year) and a tiny dance-scherzo. Its quirky character resurfaced in one of his most bizarre creations, the brief Scherzo concreto (1964), in which each instrumentalist takes on an archetype, such as The Boor, The Lover or the serially minded Buffoon.

The set of three *Elegies* for mostly unaccompanied male chorus (1947) is one of four works written in the anguish of his vounger daughter Lif's death. The first, 'Grief', is a briefer reworking of the betterknown Requiem (also inspired by the tragedy). The desolate central 'Dance of Sorrow' is eclipsed by the concluding 'Sea Poem' (well over half the total length of the set), where mezzo-soprano and violin are added and in which Leifs sublimated the circumstances of his daughter's drowning. It is hauntingly performed here by an apparently scratch choir well drilled by Bernharður Wilkinson. Fine sound. **Guy Rickards** 

#### Mahler





Symphony No 9

Recorded live, September 6-8, 2013 Bonus feature: Riccardo Chailly on Mahler's Symphony No 9 and in conversation with Henry-Louis de La Grange



Here we have something very special, and a good deal more than 'just another Mahler Ninth'. 'Just another Mahler

Ninth'! What am I saying?

It wasn't too many years ago that Bruno Walter was the sole recorded representative of this towering masterpiece. Then along came the Mahler revival and, in the Ninth, Kubelík's candour, Bernstein's intensity, Klemperer's marmoreal reportage, Solti's drama and so on. Riccardo Chailly started his Mahler journey on CD with the Tenth and worked from there, consolidating a love that would deepen with the years. In conversation with Mahler scholar Henry-Louis de La Grange (included here as a filmed bonus feature) he covers such topics as Mahler and his key interpreter Willem Mengelberg, Mahler and Walter, and the

idea of taking the scores themselves as starting points towards a true understanding of the composer, rather than relying on the 'Romantic' prompt of personal biography.

A feature on Chailly's approach to the Ninth presents – in addition to shots of Mahler's composing hut in Dobbiaco in the South Tyrol and its glorious pastoral setting - Chailly explaining his highly credible theory that, rather than marking a deathly end, the symphony's serene close (triplet figures on violas) links to the wonderful viola theme that opens the Tenth, and in doing so suggests that 'life goes on'. He tells us that Berg thought the Ninth's first movement the greatest music Mahler ever composed. I would agree; and vet for me the most Bergian Mahler Ninth on disc is Karajan's (preferably his live version - DG, 7/84), whereas Chailly holds fast to something altogether more lifeaffirming. This Leipzig Ninth is Chailly off the leash, liberating the music in a way that is impassioned, positive, fitfully fractured and often ethereal. He flicks the Symphony's heartbeat opening into action with the most economical of gestures and at one or two points pushes for maximum excitement and extra contrast (ie at 7'33" into the first movement, far faster and more dramatic than on Chailly's Royal Concertgebouw recording for Decca, or the parallel broadening at 8'40"). The second movement is a very rustic Ländler, again far faster than in Amsterdam, with cheeky woodwinds, less gemütlich than Bohemian. Abbado in Lucerne makes more of a play for the Austrian angle.

Being live, not every detail is perfect but it will take a very critical ear to notice what isn't. The Rondo-Burleske suggests manic chamber music, with swirling string figurations, forceful brass and loudly protesting woodwind solos an impatient traversal, cynical and uncompromising. Under Chailly's direction the finale's hymn-like opening is beautifully played, the colossal final climax overwhelming, the quiet close held as if on a single breath. Both Chailly and Abbado inspire their respective string sections to give of their very best, Abbado's Lucerne orchestra perhaps marginally fuller in tone, but there's very little in it. Camera direction takes the predictable route of centring on prominent instrumental lines, though never to the point of eccentricity, and the sound quality is excellent. All in all an exceptional production. Rob Cowan

Selected comparison:

Lucerne Fest Orch, Abbado (6/11) (ACCE)

**№** ACC20214; **№** ACC10214



Not just another Ninth: Riccardo Chailly conducts the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra on an exceptional DVD recording of Mahler's last completed symphony

#### **Mozart**

Piano Concertos - No 14, K449; No 21, K467. Ch'io mi scordi di te?, K505ª

<sup>a</sup>Carolyn Sampson *sop* Ronald Brautigam *fp*Cologne Academy / Michael Alexander Willens
BIS (₱) ■ BIS2054 (56' • DDD/DSD)



Perform K449 as conceived with oboes and horns – not just for strings as Mozart

also sanctioned - and the difference is palpable, especially with period instruments as here. And dramatic indeed is the sound of horns crooked to play at written pitch. Yet not quite as dramatic in this recording, because the orchestra is a little backward in relation to the fortepiano; which doesn't help a small string complement, beginning with four each of first and second violins. Ronald Brautigam, playing continuo too and varying as he usually does from insouciance to dedication in concert or studio, shows his negative side in the first movement, an Allegro vivace without much vivacity either from him or Michael Alexander Willens. Both err towards bluntness in a slow movement too fast for Andantino (the diminutive of Andante,

strictly speaking meant to be slower) and rattle through the finale at a tempo that's beyond *Allegro ma non troppo*.

Despair not. Brautigam puts his best foot forward for the remainder of the programme, and with Willens in far finer form they offer an interpretation of K467 that scales the heights of a work on a symphonic scale, both artists refusing to stint on a creative approach to the score. It's a remarkably superior performance, excellently engineered, all instruments realistically balanced with one another; and Brautigam's superiority extends further to offer Carolyn Sampson a flexible give and take to support her expressively phrased and perceptively discerned text of *Ch'io mi scordi di te?* 

#### Nalen Anthoni

K449 – selected comparison: Levin, AAM, Hogwood (2/00) (LOIL) 458 285-20H Concertos – selected comparison: Bilson, EBS, Gardiner

(3/85<sup>R</sup>, 1/88<sup>R</sup>) (ARCH) 463 111-2AB9

(3/8)", 1/88") (ARCH) 403 1

#### Mozart

Symphonies - No 39, K543; No 40, K550 Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra / Sándor Végh Belvedere M BCD10147 (61' • DDD) Recorded live at the Grosses Festspielhaus, Salzburg, January 30, 1992



Dialogue in sound, from start to finish... that's what these memorable

performances are about. Time and again in both symphonies you can freshly appreciate how one instrumental desk takes its cue from another, how what you previously thought were subsidiary lines are suddenly infused with meaning. Why? Probably because Sándor Végh, leader of a great string quartet and celebrated participant in Casals's legendary Prades music festivals, knew how to connect with his colleagues, forge a link, prompt a 'speaking' relationship where, being first among equals, he could inspire every musician to express his or her personality.

The style here takes warmth and rhythmic solidity as starting points, much as Casals did on his Mozart recordings many years earlier. Note the rustically rocking clarinet in the Minuet of No 39, or the gutsy attack of Végh's approach to the G minor's Minuet. Not for him an anxiously aggressive G minor *Allegro molto* first movement à la Furtwängler but more an elegiac oration, oppressively dark

though fairly transparent. Both firstmovement repeats are played and in the case of the G minor the two chords that lead to the development are slowed for extra emphasis. Ditto in the parallel episode of the finale, which hints at rhythmic disruption, not with quite the startling effect that Harnoncourt opts for on his recordings but pretty close. Who inspired whom, I wonder, if at all? Végh plays the first version of the G minor, without clarinets, a preferable option in my view. The Vienna Phil are on superb form: it's as if they had suddenly become Végh's band, and only his; and although their pooled tone is as distinct, as ever you can sense an interpretative genius at the helm. Good sound and minimally audible audience presence. Altogether a wonderful listening experience.

**Rob Cowan** 

#### Nielsen

Symphonies - No 5, Op 50; No 6, 'Sinfonia semplice' New York Philharmonic Orchestra / Alan Gilbert Dacapo (F) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ 6 220625 (71' • DDD/DSD) Recorded live at Avery Fisher Hall, Lincoln Center, New York, October 1-3, 2014



The concluding volume of Alan Gilbert's Nielsen cycle fully matches up to

its predecessors. In fact, taking the first movements alone, it arguably surpasses them. Gilbert hits on an ideal tempo for the apathetic yet vaguely menacing opening of the Fifth Symphony (Tempo giusto the composer marks it, not entirely helpfully); and from here, through the various phases of anguish, self-assertion and earthshattering conflict, he and his players never lose the dramatic thread. The sidedrumming is among the best on disc. In the Sinfonia semplice - psychologically far more challenging to interpret, of course - the varied moods are once again both sharply delineated and satisfyingly integrated. Only the very finest rivals, such as those listed below, show what further horizons can open up, given, for example, a more flamboyant clarinet in the Fifth or weightier strings in the Sixth.

More serious problems emerge with the later movements. Gilbert is a notch or two under the metronome mark for the *Allegro* of the Fifth, as though taking a safety-first approach in view of the mayhem to come, and the following fugato, while not exactly tame, is still by no means as scary as it should be. Similarly, the 'Humoresque' in

the Sixth may be one of the shapelier accounts on disc but that comes at a cost to its sardonic edge, while the variations finale feels too sane for its carnivalesque craziness to have maximum impact.

In sum, this is a reliable and intermittently distinguished modern set of the Nielsen symphonies, to rank alongside the likes of Schønwandt (now on Naxos). If the fates allow, I can imagine conductor and orchestra revisiting the repertoire in 10 or 20 years' time, with a myriad of small adjustments and overall increased confidence, and giving us something to rival the very best of Nielsen recordings.

Sym No 5 – selected comparison: NYPO, Bernstein (5/63<sup>R</sup>, 2/11) (SONY) SM4K45989, 88697 68365-2 Sym No 6 – selected comparison: San Francisco SO, Blomstedt (2/90<sup>R</sup>) (DECC) 460 988-2DF2, 478 6469DC6

#### **Pettersson**



The Lindberg-Pettersson project continues to go from strength to strength.

After his revelatory recording of the Ninth Symphony (5/14), Lindberg now attends to No 4 (1958-59) – which initiated the compositional phase culminating in the Ninth – and No 16 (1979), probably his last fully completed work. They make a finely contrasted pair, neither perhaps holding to the stereotypical Petterssonian model.

The same strengths that informed earlier instalments in Lindberg's part of the cycle shine through once more here: a sure grasp of structure; attention to detail; and an unwavering, almost missionary zeal to communicate, burning scarcely less bright than did the composer's own. In No 4, the competition is fierce: Alun Francis's interpretation was one of the best of those he committed to CPO's incomplete compendium and remains a fine account, but Lindberg and the Norrköping Symphony Orchestra bring out the light and shade of one of Pettersson's more stylistically fractured scores, featuring radiant chorales, still more. The orchestration is also a revelation, right from the opening organ-like sonorities which (as this may be a memorial to the

composer's deeply religious mother) take on an extra resonance.

The Sixteenth, part symphony, part saxophone concerto, is no mere filler but a major coupling in its own right. Soloist Jörgen Pettersson has made a point of performing the work precisely as written, without the modifications made by John-Edward Kelly on his otherwise fine CPO account. The result is the most fluent account of this final flowering of Pettersson's symphonic mastery. BIS's sound is rich and natural, outpointing the CPO rival and that by the work's dedicatee, Frederick Hemke, after the premiere (on Swedish Society, long nla). The fascinating bonus DVD is in Swedish with English subtitles. Guy Rickards

No 4 – comparative version: Saarbrücken SO, Francis (12/95) (CPO) CPO999 223-2 No 16 – comparative version: Kelly, Saarbrücken SO, Francis (11/96) (CPO) CPO999 284-2

## Prokofiev · Tchaikovsky

Prokofiev Piano Concerto No 2, Op 16
Tchaikovsky Piano Concerto No 1, Op 23
Kirill Gerstein pf Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester
Berlin / James Gaffigan

Myrios © MYR016 (66' • DDD)



As pianist Kirill Gerstein discusses in this issue (see page 48), the new

critical edition of Tchaikovsky's First Piano Concerto contains numerous textual differences from the so-called standard edition we all know and love, such as arpeggiated opening piano chords and a restored cut in the finale's central episode. Hearing the Andantino's scherzo section as an allegro vivace assai rather than the traditional prestissimo imparts more breathing room and a genuinely balletic subtext to the cross-rhythmic pianowriting and lilting string melodies. But listeners waiting for the Allegro con spirito's two-note phrase groups to playfully scamper may find Gerstein too sober and earthbound, although his shapely octaves and solo passages with bass-lines to the fore better showcase his mindful virtuosity. The clean and conscientious finale comes alive in the coda but falls short of the incisive soloist/orchestra sparring and sweeping dynamism distinguishing the better-balanced Argerich/Abbado reference version.

The piano is too forwardly mixed for the chamber-like repartee and elaborate scoring of Prokofiev's Second Concerto to match the recent Wang/Dudamel recording's visceral impact and textural diversity. For example, Dudamel shoves the Intermezzo's pesante accents in your face, while the descending staccato clarinet triplets against the pungent horns fully register. The Berliners, by contrast, are more reticently blended. For his part, Gerstein seems happier flailing away in Prokofiev's exotic fare than dishing out Tchaikovsky's meat and potatoes: notice the pianist's effortless negotiation of the finale's extensive motoric passages or his forceful projection and colourful nuance in the thick first-movement cadenza, and you may well agree. Jed Distler

Tchaikovsky - selected comparison: Argerich, BPO, Abbado (9/96) (DG) 449 816-2GH or 477 8124GB7 Prokofiev - selected comparison: Wang, Simón Bolívar SO, Dudamel (2/14) (DG) 479 1304GH

#### Rütti · Diethelm

Diethelm Passacaglia, 'A white Christmas rose in the snow on the small grave', Op 324. Consolatio, Op 324a. 'Now the path completes the circle', Op 338 Rütti Symphony, 'The Visions of Niklaus von Flüe'a

<sup>a</sup>Maria C Schmid sop <sup>a</sup>Martin Heini org <sup>a</sup>Mario Schubiger perc Novosibirsk State Philharmonic Chamber Orchestra / Rainer Held Guild (B) (2) GMCD7407 (93' • DDD)



Niklaus von Flüe ('Brother Klaus', 1417-87) is the patron saint of Switzerland

whose three recorded visions dominate the content and structure of this hour-long symphony by Carl Rütti (b1949). Cast in seven movements, which subdivide into three Parts (one per vision), The Visions of Niklaus von Flüe (2013) strikes me as a type of national programme symphony, such as one might have expected 150 years ago from Raff or Hans Huber (whose First Symphony, the Tellsinfonie, perhaps fits the bill). However, Rütti's 21st-century, postmodernist style, ascetic scoring - for soprano, organ, percussion (one player) and strings - and atmosphere of restraint militate against such a status, so it is best heard as an expression of the composer's own relationship to the national saint and the visions he experienced.

Musically, the work is written in a cosmopolitan style, with the recurring elements of the visions reflected in motto themes (more or less developed) in the fabric of the symphony. The structure of the work is led by the extramusical

inspiration of the visions, although Rütti reversed the order of the final two to give a more satisfying musical flow (although against the narrative flow of the visions themselves). The symphony is well executed here, not least by soprano Maria Schmid, who has a long and taxing part, occasionally insecure in the topmost register. Rainer Held directs a nicely balanced and nuanced performance from the Novosibirsk State Philharmonic Chamber Orchestra and the instrumental soloists who, while they may have found the style unusual, do not sound overly challenged.

The same positives apply to the couplings on the curiously underfilled second disc (just 27' long), devoted to the final string orchestral works of Caspar Diethelm (1926-97). The three works here two short memorial items (the Passacaglia and Consolatio) and the set of studies 'Now the path completes the circle' for a Swiss youth ensemble - all date from his final year and are pleasing enough, but for the life of me I do not understand why they were included. There is no specific connection between Rütti and Diethelm that I am aware of and the half-filled second disc would, I suggest, have been more useful as a separate issue filled with Diethelm's music. Guv Rickards

#### Saint-Saëns

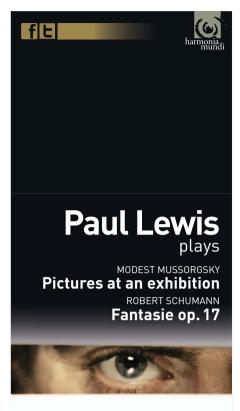
'Complete Works for Cello and Orchestra' Cello Concertos - No 1, Op 33; No 2, Op 119. Suite, Op 16. Romance, Op 36. Allegro appassionato, Op 43. Carnaval des animaux - Le cygne Johannes Moser VC SWR Symphony Orchestra, Stuttgart / Fabrice Bollon

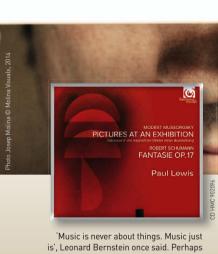


There is no shortage of these Saint-Saëns works in the catalogue. Last year alone ZZT

released all the music for cello and orchestra in its excellent three-CD set by soloists of the Queen Elisabeth Music Chapel embracing also the works for violin and orchestra (4/14), followed shortly afterwards by Natalie Clein in the two cello concertos, the Allegro appassionato, 'Le cygne' and (with violinist Antje Weithaas) La muse et le poète (Hyperion, A/14).

Johannes Moser, in these recordings made in Stuttgart in 2007, adds the F major Romance, Op 36, and the D minor Suite, Op 16, but omits La muse et le poète. Nevertheless, poetry is one of the prime qualities of his playing. Allied to the scintillating bravura that he brings to the





that was why Schumann decided to remove the evocative titles ('Ruin, Triumphal Arch. Constellation') from his Fantasie: the music has an independent existence without them. Is the same true of Pictures at an Exhibition? Mussorgsky created here something subtler and more ambivalent than Hartmann's paintings might suggest. Alongside the dazzling virtuosity they call for, Paul Lewis's unexpected coupling reveals the purely musical qualities of these two 19th-century masterpieces.

'Fascinating and irresistible . . . Lewis is a more rhetorical, self-assured artist than he was in his late twenties . . wonderfully played . . . Lewis is one of the great Schubertians of our time." Harriet Smith, Gramophone

harmoniamundi.com

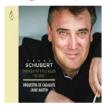


outer movements of the First Concerto. injecting them as he does so with thrilling impetus, there is a lyrical beauty and suppleness to the slow movement that is voiced through a mellowness of tone and a natural poise in the shaping of lines. The less frequently heard Second Concerto and the D minor Suite are, as Moser says, 'unencumbered by the weight of tradition', allowing him to 'act more naturally, without prejudice'. Even the First Concerto sounds utterly fresh in his hands but the strong case he makes for the Second Concerto and the Suite, in harness with astute orchestral playing, lends them - in common with the Romance, Allegro appassionato and 'The Swan' – an especially stimulating presence and a beguiling fusion of finesse and animation. **Geoffrey Norris** 

#### **Schubert**

Symphony No 9, 'Great', D944

Orquestra de Cadaqués / Jaime Martín
Tritó ® TD0101 (60' • DDD)



I've already sung the praises of flautistturned-conductor Jaime Martín in his

Tritó coupling devoted to Catalan composers Juli Garreta and Eduardo Toldrà (4/13), and now find much to like in his recording of Schubert's Great C major Symphony. Not only is he laudably attentive to the spirit and text of this mighty edifice (unless I'm mistaken, every repeat is observed), he draws some highly personable, beautifully blended and exquisitely turned playing from the Orquestra de Cadaqués (founded in 1988 for the eponymous music festival). Martín's pacing is spot-on, his approach admirably unmannered. He also possesses a keen ear and is judicious in matters of balance (I particularly enjoyed the trombones' tasteful contribution throughout), and the whole performance radiates a nourishing sense of proportion, dedication and grace that are very endearing (the Trio section has a gentle swing and delicious poise about it that cannot fail to lift the spirits).

Collectors weaned on old-school masters such as Toscanini (especially his blisteringly eloquent 1941 Philadelphia account), Mengelberg, Walter, Furtwängler, Konwitschny, Munch, Szell, Boult, Krips, Kubelík, Wand and Haitink may find it all a wee bit polite (I'm thinking in particular of the seismic climax of the slow movement), but I for one am happy to have made this lithe and fresh-faced

newcomer's acquaintance. Glowingly engineered in the Auditorio de Zaragoza (which evidently boasts a very kind acoustic), this strikes me as well worth hunting down. Andrew Achenbach

#### **Sciarrino**

Cantare con silenzio<sup>a</sup>. Berceuse. Libro notturno delle voci<sup>b</sup>

<sup>ab</sup>Mario Caroli ff <sup>a</sup>Neue Vocalsolisten;
Tokyo Philharmonic Orchestra / Marco Angius
Stradivarius ® STR33987 (78' • DDD)



Salvatore Sciarrino's early-period orchestral piece *Berceuse* (1967-69)

provides a disappointingly still centre to the turning, transformative sound universe of his *Cantare con silenzio* (1999) and *Libro notturno delle voci* (2009), recent works he designed to feature his flautist-of-choice Mario Caroli, both pieces relishing the prospect of stripping orchestral utterance to its barest minimum, exposing naked orchestral flesh.

Sciarrino – of course he does – begins Libro notturno delle voci deep in the lowregister entrails of the orchestra, a compositional decision clearly designed to tease audience expectations - is the solo flautist ever going to show his face? And that opening sound is peculiarly beautiful and fine-spun: two cellos slide gracefully around pitches with all the icy precision of Robin Cousins, the second cello arranged in strict canon to the first. Mario Caroli has issued an earlier recording of Sciarrino's piece: the premiere appeared on a Neos disc alongside music by Beat Furrer and Jimmy López. But this new performance is faster, tighter, played by the Tokyo Philharmonic with a porcelain delicacy that is beyond, apparently, Neos's SWR Sinfonieorchester Baden-Baden und Freiburg. And as the music takes wing, the flautist pecking at harmonics and sending breathy spirals of sound through the air, that extra urgency makes a notable difference.

Despite my misgivings about *Berceuse* – its inner harmonic life feels oddly and entirely uncharacteristically flat – Sciarrino buffs will want to hear this important early work, while *Cantare con silenzio* is a true marvel. Scored for flute, six voices, percussion and live electronics, Sciarrino's piece urgently plays itself out in the present tense while implying a multiplicity of temporal layering. The flautist stands encased by metal sheets that are wired up with contact microphones which amplify

each vibrating gesture. And then, suddenly, he isn't and the natural tones of the flute reverberate across sparse vocal lines punctuated by the bouldering muscularity of the percussion. And a final masterstroke: rhythms are tapped out on stones like a primeval retort to all the fancy electronic wiring – like Stanley Kubrick's bone being tossed up into space. Philip Clark

Libro notturno delle voci – comparative version: Caroli, SWR SO, Furrer (NEOS) NEOS11051

#### Shostakovich · Tchaikovsky

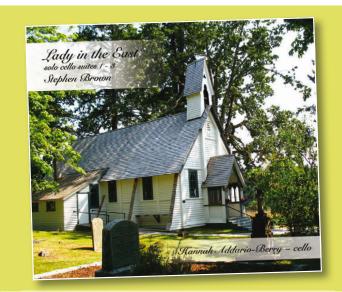
Shostakovich String Quartet No 2, Op 68 (arr Morton) Tchaikovsky Serenade, Op 48 Scottish Ensemble / Jonathan Morton vn Linn © CKD472 (65' • DDD)



Coupling Tchaikovsky's Serenade with Shostakovich's Second

Quartet seems eccentric even for an ensemble that, so the record blurb tells us, 'habitually blends music from different ages, offering new perspectives and making unexpected connections'. Actually, it works well and is cleverly done. The performance of the Serenade is exceptionally lively and fresh, with an opening Andante exuberant rather than stately, and a bright, brisk Allegro whose speed, like that of the finale, sounds at times only just within reach. But all is well, and the Waltz has a freshness and sense of enjoyment matching the general spirit of a performance in which even the Elegy does not sound as if we should grieve too seriously.

But what has all this to do with Shostakovich's Second String Quartet, a considerably longer work written in the depths of 1944 and for a different medium? Jonathan Morton, the Ensemble's leader and director, has taken some risks. The relationship between the solo violin's cantor-like intoning – another instance of Shostakovich's deep sympathy with Jewish life and culture – loses something, or at any rate sounds substantially different, when pitted againt an ensemble rather than three other players. On the other hand, Shostakovich was testing the capacity of the string quartet to an extreme towards the end of the work (even if this of itself has a point), and here the extra richness and depth do suit the music. Morton does not attempt to lighten Shostakovich's Waltz, which the composer himself compared to that in the Third Suite of Tchaikovsky (who designated it 'Valse mélancolique'). There is, though, a major difference between the two finales, though they both



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"...achingly beautiful. The suite was enormously effective -I struggle to find the words to express how charmed I was by this music." Music in Victoria

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deal in varation technique, Tchaikovsky with plenty of folkish merriment, Shostakovich in a more developmental and reflective manner. The two works. in fact, are not only extremely well and intelligently played but give the listener much food for thought about Russia in their juxtaposition. John Warrack

#### R Strauss

Ein Heldenleben, Op 40. Metamorphosen ORF Vienna Radio Symphony Orchestra / **Cornelius Meister** 

Capriccio (F) C5208 (69' • DDD)



Richard Strauss's Ein Heldenleben (1897-98) is known for its autobiography and the

composer provided with it a titled narrative programme. The violin solo depicting Strauss's loving wife Pauline is charismatically played by Maighréad McCrann, and is followed of course by the caricature depiction of the composer's adversaries, over whom he is finally victorious. The soaring horns on this performance from the Vienna Radio Symphony Orchestra move the narration onwards into 'The Hero's Works of Peace' (where Strauss looks back over his past musical successes), while 'The Hero's Retirement and Fulfilment' brings an apotheosis with a glorious closing theme for strings and a particularly well-taken horn solo before the final cadence.

This excellently recorded performance under Cornelius Meister is superbly played and spontaneous. It stands up well against its countless rivals, notably Karajan and the ardently sumptuous Berlin Philharmonic, which Richard Osborne described as 'lambent in its beauty'. Beecham with the RPO, also on Testament, is a model of its kind, a glorious performance, authoritative and marvellously played, while Jansons's equally magnificent Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra recording comes in a splendid SACD performance in which the sound appears entirely natural.

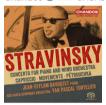
Metamorphosen for 23 solo strings can be regarded as being 'a commemoration of a world destroyed'. Much of Berlin, Dresden and Vienna had been destroyed when Strauss wrote his own memorable in memoriam in 1945. It is in three parts, flowing over into one another, while two slow sections frame a slightly quicker section. Overall it is intense; but it only gradually becomes really tragic in the closing pages. The Vienna orchestra and Meister play it with a passionate impetus

that is wholly spontaneous, with a valedictory feeling. The recording is outstandingly fine. Rattle is the main competitor here, who with the Vienna Philharmonic produces sounds of magical beauty and intensity, but Karajan is again at his very finest with the Berlin Philharmonic, Ivan March

Ein Heldenleben – selected comparisons: BPO, Karajan (1/09) (TEST) SBT1430 RPO, Beecham (TEST) SBT1147 RCO, Jansons (RCO) RCO04005 Metamorphosen - selected comparison: VPO, Rattle (8/98) (EMI) 556580-2

#### Stravinsky

Concerto for Piano and Wind Instruments. Capriccio, Movements, Petrushka Jean-Efflam Bavouzet pf São Paulo Symphony Orchestra / Yan-Pascal Tortelier Chandos (F) . CHSA5147 (80' • DDD/DSD)



Stravinsky was a more than capable pianist, having been given rigorous training

by a distinguished teacher, Leokadia Kashperova, who in her youth had sat at the feet of Anton Rubinstein, no less. These works are technically demanding and also require a subtlety of approach which Jean-Efflam Bavouzet fully understands. He even declares, in a note to this recording, a 'Dionysiac delight' in being almost totally submerged in parts of Tortelier's fine performance of Petrushka, with its origins in Stravinsky's imagination as a piano concertante piece.

But it is the three works for solo piano which are the main point of this recording. Bayouzet has the expressive range demanded by the Concerto, which includes an appreciation of style including Baroque as well as tango, all somehow contained within a classical framework, while keeping a cool head through a forest of lightning tempo changes not excelled in The Rite of Spring itself. He is fully in control and has the ability to give it all a natural fluency, though, for all the respect he pays the work, it is difficult not feel that he enjoys himself more in the Capriccio. It is, of course, a much more enjoyable work, in that it has a lightness and immediacy of impact that also require from the performer the suggestion not to take life too seriously. As for Movements: written once Stravinsky's arch-rival Schoenberg was safely dead and Webern was the flavour of the moment, it takes on Boulez and others in manipulating multi-serialism but actually does not break with techniques that were latent in

Stravinsky himself as early as The Rite. Not that anyone is going to trouble with that in listening to what is best heard, surely, as the old master still able to write beguiling sounds. It is an oddity in his output, but of course worth including for the sake of completeness in this excellent record.

John Warrack

#### **Vaughan Williams**



Symphony No 3, 'Pastoral Symphony'a. Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis. Five Variants of 'Dives and Lazarus'. The Wasps - Overture <sup>a</sup>Sarah Fox SOP Hallé Orchestra / Sir Mark Elder Hallé (F) CDHLL7540 (74' • DDD)



This is, to my mind, the finest volume vet in Sir Mark Elder's unfolding Vaughan

Williams cycle with the Hallé. Abetted by uncommonly articulate orchestral playing, the performance of the Pastoral Symphony evinces a glowing dedication, remarkable luminosity of texture, songful rapture and emotional clout that mark it out as a frontrunner alongside Boult (Decca), Previn (RCA), Handley (CfP) and Haitink (EMI).

In the opening Molto moderato Elder's enviably lucid conception distils both slumbering organic power and piercing heartache to the manner born, while the E flat trumpet and natural horn's elegiac solos during the second movement really do bring a lump to the throat. The scherzo will make you sit up, such is the muscular vigour and fiery snap on show; like Handley before him, Elder is memorably appreciative of RVW's brillante marking for the trumpets and trombones in the recurring trio section, though no partnership has equalled Previn and his light-as-thistledown LSO in the magical *Presto* coda. The finale is superbly handled: that astounding unison cry at one bar before fig J (7'03") projects with searing intensity, and those giddily eloquent measures from three before fig O (8'03") leading up to the towering climax are truly sostenuto as requested. My sole grumble is that Sarah Fox (who sings her wordless vocalise beautifully) might perhaps have been afforded a less close balance.

The couplings yield comparable rewards. I'm especially taken with Elder's thrillingly ardent and bracingly characterful way with Five Variants of 'Dives and Lazarus'; both here and in the Tallis Fantasia (which also enjoys subtly observant, pliable and profoundly moving treatment) the Hallé strings cover themselves in glory.

An exhilaratingly crisp yet wonderfully affectionate *Wasps* Overture rounds off proceedings with aplomb. Two different venues were employed but the sound consistently displays commendable transparency, warmth, depth and antiphonal spread. A marvellous disc.

#### **Andrew Achenbach**

Pastoral Sym – selected comparisons: LPO, Boult (7/53<sup>R</sup>, 2/03) (DECC) 473 241-2 LSO, Previn (9/72<sup>R</sup>, A/04) (RCA) 82876 55708-2 RLPO, Handley (11/92<sup>R</sup>) (CFP) 575760-2 LPO, Haitink (5/98<sup>R</sup>) (EMI/WARN) 984759-2

#### Weinberg

Chamber Symphonies -No 3, Op 151; No 4, Op 153 Helsingborg Symphony Orchestra / Thord Syedlund

Chandos (F) . CHSA5146 (66' • DDD/DSD)



Mieczysław Weinberg's time would certainly seem to be now. Advocacy

plays a big part in that, of course, and recent champions such as the young German violinist Linus Roth – whose recordings of the Violin Concerto and sonatas (Challenge Classics, 9/13, 7/14) have really whetted appetites – can really bring about a sea change in interest. This latest release of late chamber symphonies (and be advised the numbering belies the presence of 21 earlier symphonies) further adds to the fascination, and such is the emotional and highly personal nature of Weinberg's musical language that it's nigh-on impossible not to be drawn into his confidence.

The opening Lento of Symphony No 3 for string orchestra, which is in turn directly derived from his String Quartet No 5 (these pieces not only evolve from earlier works but thrive on self-quotation from elsewhere in his oeuvre), is entitled 'Melody' and that is precisely what you get - an unvarnished unison in search of harmony and development (very Bartókian), both of which it finds before emerging once more as the purest 'confessional'. In the boisterous and explosive second movement it's as if both Britten and Shostakovich have morphed into a dynamic and wilful alliance. Weinberg undoubtedly gets his immediacy and nose for atmosphere from Shostakovich (his self-confessed idol - and there was mutual admiration) but he is his

own man and full of surprises. A boldness and directness prevails and he clearly relishes the gamesmanship of composition – like the freewheeling *Andantino* finale of this piece.

The Fourth opens with a great example of what makes Weinberg's themes so individual: a 'Chorale' borrowed from his opera The Portrait, it's a total 'earworm'. But suddenly there is an obbligato clarinet among the strings and with it a multitude of Klezmer associations. That clarinet enjoys a wild ride in the second-movement Allegro molto, and again the rug is pulled from beneath us at the close when solo violin and cello are given quite unexpected monologues like afterthoughts on what has passed. An aching folksiness pervades the slow movement and a triangle offers two single shafts of light at the beginning and very end (a tiny touch of genius) of a final movement which seems to have been composed in the playing of it.

The Helsingborg Symphony Orchestra under Thord Svedlund make an excellent case for these intriguing pieces and Chandos brings them to us with vivid immediacy. Weinberg is coming in from the cold.

Edward Seckerson



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"A memorable interpretation" BBC Magazine
"A superb high level quartet of soloists" The Guardian
"A new and magnificent version of Mozart's Requiem" Le Monde

## **LOG BOOK**

# MOZART'S REQUIEM AT CHÂTEAU DE VERSAILLES DISCOVER CLASSICAL MUSIC BACKSTAGE IN A NEW WEBSERIAL!

Lorenzo, an unconditional fan of Mozart and conductor Laurence Equilbey, manages to get himself invited to the recording session for the Requiem at the Versailles Palace in France...

www.goo.gl/vj8329

Co -founded by Laurence Equilbey and the Conseil Général des Hauts-de-Seine in 2012, Insula orchestra's artistic project is built around a repertoire ranging mainly from the Classical to the Romantic eras, with symphonic programmes as well as programmes with choir and soloists.

The orchestra plays on period instruments, working on sonority appropriate for today's large concert halls.

The musicians - gathered around a small group of renowned and experienced section leaders - are recruited among the young generation graduating from European specialised higher education institutions.





#### Guðný Guðmundsdóttir

Ágústsson Formgerð II (Structure II)<sup>a</sup>
Britten Violin Concerto, Op 15<sup>b</sup> Elgar Violin
Concerto, Op 61<sup>c</sup> Pálsson Violin Concerto<sup>d</sup>
Guðný Guðmundsdóttir vn Iceland Symphony
Orchestra / <sup>a</sup>Richard Bernas, <sup>b</sup>Sidney Harth,
<sup>c</sup>James Loughran, <sup>d</sup>Petri Sakari
Smekkleysa ® ② ISO1 (135' • DDD)
Recorded 1992-2001



A product of the Reykjavík Music School, Eastman School of Music,

Royal College of Music and Juilliard School, Guðný Guðmundsdóttir was just 26 when she was appointed the first concertmaster of the Iceland Symphony Orchestra. She held the post for 36 years, regularly appearing as a soloist giving the Icelandic premieres of a host of concertos, three of which have been capably captured here by Iceland's state broadcaster.

Guðmundsdóttir is not the first orchestral leader to record the Elgar - one thinks of Philharmonia stalwart Hugh Bean's delectably idiomatic 1972 account with Sir Charles Groves and the RLPO (last reissued on a Classics for Pleasure double-pack, 11/04). By and large, her reading evinces a selfless commitment and big heart that are endearing (the work's closing pages have a genuine sense of homecoming and elation about them). The tone of her 1728 'del Gesù' Guarneri falls beguilingly on the ear, while the richly experienced James Loughran accompanies sympathetically; indeed, there are some lovely things in the slow movement (try from 10'49" to the end). However, when all's said and done, there's an unhelpful want of tumbling fantasy, canny instinct and true authority – in which respects both Bean and his legendary mentor Albert Sammons (Naxos, 5/02) are in a different league altogether.

It's a similar story in the Britten, whose formidable technical challenges are not always comfortably negotiated by the otherwise dedicated soloist. Granted, the Icelanders respond with a will under the baton of Sidney Harth but the performance as a whole lags some way behind those from, say, Ida Haendel, Lorraine McAslan, Daniel Hope, Janine Jansen, Frank Peter Zimmermann, Tasmin Little and (most recently) Linus Roth (Challenge Classics, 7/14). The Britten is followed by the urgently expressive, notably resourceful and readily assimilable Violin Concerto that Páll Pampichler Pálsson (b1928) fashioned for Guðmundsdóttir in 1997-98.

Suffice to say, the dedicatee plays with total conviction and is excellently partnered by Petri Sakari. Like Pálsson, Herbert H Ágústsson (b1926) originally hailed from Austria and is now a naturalised Icelander. His 17-minute Structure II (1978-79) comprises a theme and six variations and wears a somewhat stern (though by no means forbidding) countenance. It receives another first-class performance from Guðmundsdóttir, this time with Richard Bernas on the podium. Overall verdict? A mixed bag, so I strongly advise you sample before purchasing. Andrew Achenbach

#### 'British String Concertos'

Banks Violin Concerto<sup>a</sup> W Busch Cello Concerto<sup>b</sup> Coleridge-Taylor Violin Concerto. Op 80° Finzi Introit, Op 6d Fricker Violin Concerto, Op 11e Gerhard Violin Concertof Hoddinott Nocturnes and Cadenzas, Op 629 Holst Double Concerto, Op 49h, Invocation. Op 19 No 2i. Lyric Movementi Maconchy Serenata concertante<sup>k</sup> Moeran Violin Concerto D Morgan Violin Concerto Rubbra Soliloquy, Op 57<sup>n</sup> dRodney Friend, John Georgiadis, Erich Gruenberg, hEmmanuel Hurwitz, Lorraine McAslan, aefYfrah Neaman, kManoug Parikian, hKenneth Sillito vns jCecil Aronowitz va iAlexander Baillie, "Rohan de Saram, bRaphael Wallfisch, <sup>9</sup>Moray Welsh VCS <sup>f</sup>BBC Symphony Orchestra: hjEnglish Chamber Orchestra; <sup>cdi</sup>London Philharmonic Orchestra; kin London Symphony Orchestra; <sup>9</sup>Philharmonia Orchestra; <sup>abem</sup>Royal Philharmonic Orchestra; David Atherton, dSir Adrian Boult, Nicholas Braithwaite, Colin Davis, ae Norman Del Mar, gSir Charles Groves. bklmnVernon Handley, hjlmogen Holst conds Lyrita S 4 SRCD2346 (5h 6' • ADD/DDD) From <sup>i</sup>SRCD209 (6/93); <sup>hj</sup>SRCD223 (5/67<sup>R</sup>, 7/70<sup>R</sup>, 4/93); <sup>n</sup>SRCD234 (1/80<sup>R</sup>, 10/92); <sup>d</sup>SRCD239 (4/78<sup>R</sup>); <sup>1</sup>SRCD248 (1/08): <sup>f</sup>SRCD274 (2/72<sup>R</sup>, 6/08): aemSRCD276 (1/75<sup>R</sup>, 8/75<sup>R</sup>, 5/78<sup>R</sup>, 9/08); kSRCD288 (5/82<sup>R</sup>); <sup>c</sup>SRCD317 (12/07); <sup>b</sup>SRCD320 (2/08); gSRCD332 (6/82R, 2/97)



The release of this four-CD set of works for solo string instruments and

orchestra pays tribute, as does the recently issued box-set of 'British Piano Concertos', to the imagination and vision of the late Richard Itter and his pioneering Lyrita label. For many, Lyrita was *the* British music label and was loyally supported by various 'in house' conductors, among them Adrian Boult, Nicholas Braithwaite, Norman Del Mar and Vernon Handley. Many of the recordings offered here are from the old Lyrita analogue and early

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#### **Britten's Violin Concerto**

Three recordings that came before Guðmundsdóttir's and how we rated them



AUGUST 1971 Britten Violin Concerto, Op 15 Mark Lubotsky *vn* English Chamber Orchestra / Benjamin Britten

Decca SXL6512 (£2:39)

The Violin Concerto, most beautifully played here, has not yet fully entered the repertory in its due position as one of the most important violin concertos of our day. I hope this splendid recording will do something to advance its cause; for this is not a wholly easy work to penetrate, having, despite its attractive sound world, a curious, oblique and distinctly disturbing emotional content. Britten discovers a regretful eloquence, an open Romanticism that had been concealed behind a barrier in most of his previous music. John Warrack

#### GRAMOPHONE MAY 1978



Britten Violin Concerto, Op 15
Ida Haendel *vn*Bournemouth Symphony
Orchestra / Paavo Berglund
HMV ASD3483 (£3-99)

Haendel's technical security is so complete that there is almost too little sense of uncertainty: the tenderness of the playing leaves one in no doubt that this is one of Britten's earliest masterpieces, in no sense an immature work as it once used to be thought. The double-stopping is fantastically precise, no mere celery-crunching. In comparison with Lubotsky's performance, this one is not quite so volatile, so ready to convey the more delicate undertones of Britten's writing. *John Warrack* 

# GRAMOP NE PLANCOLOUR CONTROL OF THE PLANCOLO

JANUARY 2010 Britten Violin Concerto, Op 15

Janine Jansen vn London
Symphony Orchestra / Paavo Järvi
Decca © 478 1530DGH (73' • DDD)
Jansen and Järvi's performance

contrasts with Vengerov's fine 2002 recording. Whereas Vengerov stresses the music's romantic aspects and the performance emphasises blended sonorities, Jansen shows the work's more uncomfortable, angular side. The irregular rhythms and sharp contrasts of the central *Vivace* are more sharply delineated and, towards the end of the concluding Passacaglia, Jansen builds to a painful degree of intensity and desperation, surely just right for a concerto written at the close of the Spanish civil war for the (strongly anti-fascist) Catalan violinist Antonio Brosa. *Duncan Druce* 

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## IN THE STUDIO

## An inside view of who's before the mics and what they're recording

#### · Karttunen's Couperin

Since signing to the Divine Art label, Finnish harpsichordist **Assi Karttunen** (pictured) has wasted no time recording her first disc for it – a juxtaposition of works by the French Baroque master François Couperin with new music for the instrument by British composer Graham Lynch but written in the same 'expressive tradition' as Couperin's. Divine Art will release the disc this year.



#### · Gilchrist's Dichterliebe

As this issue of *Gramophone* was going to press, tenor **James Gilchrist** was preparing to record Schumann's song-cycles *Dichterliebe* and *Liederkreis* with his regular accompanist Anna Tilbrook. Linn will turn the disc around quickly for an April release.

- Prokofiev in Bournemouth
   Kirill Karabits and his Bournemouth
   Symphony Orchestra have arrived at the
   business end of their Prokofiev cycle for
   Onyx, recording the Fifth Symphony and
   Two Poems with Women's Voices for release
   later this year.
- Glazunov in Bournemouth
   Staying in Bournemouth, Greek violinist
   Efi Christodoulou is set to record works
   for violin and orchestra by Sibelius and
   Glazunov both born 150 years ago this
   year with the BSO for Somm. Glazunov's
   Violin Concerto will be coupled with Sibelius's
   Six Humoresques, both under the baton of
   John Carewe, for release in June.
- Anniversary concertos in Tampere Baiba Skride will also issue a recording of the Sibelius this year on Orfeo, coupled with the Violin Concerto by his exact contemporary Carl Nielsen. The recordings were made live at concerts with the Tampere Philharmonic under Santtu-Matias Rouvali in January, when Skride played both works in one concert.

digital catalogue but there are a few recordings made during the label's short revival between 1993 and 1996 which were not issued until more than a decade after they were made.

The set makes for fantastic value for money, each CD containing well over 70 minutes of music, and the performances are generally of tremendous vibrancy and quality. Lorraine McAslan's reading of Coleridge-Taylor's 1912 Violin Concerto is surely the best recording we have of this much-neglected work and the two Holst works - the Double Concerto for two violins with Emmanuel Hurwitz and Kenneth Sillito and the brooding Lyric Movement for viola and orchestra with Cecil Aronowitz - with their immediacy by no means betray the fact that they were recorded over 40 years ago. The rarely played Cello Concerto by William Busch is a tender gem in the hands of Raphael Wallfisch and I have a particular fondness for the first modern recording of Moeran's achingly lyrical Violin Concerto with John Georgiadis. The set is generously laden with concertos written after the Second World War, including Roberto Gerhard's Violin Concerto, Peter Racine Fricker's passionate Violin Concerto of 1950 (a work well worth rediscovering), Elizabeth Maconchy's numinous Serenata concertante and three works from the later 1960s: David Morgan's Violin Concerto of 1966, Don Banks's Violin Concerto of 1968 and the Nocturnes and Cadenzas for cello and orchestra by Alun Hoddinott, written and recorded the same year (1969), all of which attest to Itter's catholic and exploratory outlook and, more importantly, to his considerable legacy. Jeremy Dibble

#### 'Music for Alfred Hitchcock'

A Benjamin The Man Who Knew Too Much – The Storm Clouds (cantata, arr Herrmann)<sup>a</sup> Elfman Hitchcock – End Credits Music Herrmann The Man Who Knew Too Much – Concert Overture. North by Northwest – Main Titles. Psycho: A Narrative for String Orchestra. Vertigo – Prelude; Scène d'amour Tiomkin Dial M for Murder – Suite. Strangers on a Train – Suite Waxman Rear Window – Suite. Rebecca – Suite <sup>a</sup>Klaudia Kidon sop Danish National <sup>a</sup>Concert Choir and Symphony Orchestra / John Mauceri Toccata Classics © TOCCO241 (81' • DDD) Recorded live at the DR Concert Hall, Copenhagen, November 23 & 24, 2012



Hitchcock understood the value of music and its impact on audiences. He omitted Bernard Herrmann's searing score for *Psycho* (1960) when sending the print to the censor to ensure certification, realising its visceral power. In *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1934), the only film he remade (in 1956), a cantata plays a crucial part in the action. In the remake, Arthur Benjamin's *The Storm* was expanded by Herrmann – the composer Hitchcock worked with most productively – to impressive effect (he replaced the rest of Benjamin's score, however) and it is given a terrific performance here by Klaudia Kidon with the Danish National Concert Choir.

The main performing plaudits on this disc go to the Danish National Symphony Orchestra under John Mauceri, of course, not least in the conductor's restoration of the gripping 'Narrative for string orchestra' Herrmann made in 1968 from *Psycho*. This catches all the suspense, drama and terror of what remains one of the greatest film scores ever penned. Herrmann made several concert extracts from his cinematic music, as in the beautiful Prelude and Love scene from *Vertigo* (1958).

Hitchcock worked with other composers, including Franz Waxman – *Rebecca* (1940) and the wonderfully diverse score of *Rear Window* (1950, the music built only from what James Stewart can hear through his window) – and, on the iconic *Strangers on a Train* (1951) and *Dial M for Murder* (1954), Dimitri Tiomkin. These four scores are represented by suites in Mauceri's own editions; the Tiomkin, along with the overture from *The Man Who Knew Too Much* and the *Psycho* Narrative, here receive their first recordings. First class sound; strongly recommended. **Guy Rickards** 

#### 'Psalm'

'Contemporary British Trumpet Concertos' McCabe La primavera Pritchard Skyspace Saxton Psalm: A Song of Ascents.
Shakespeare Scenesa
Simon Desbrulais tpt Orchestra of the Swan / Kenneth Woods, aDavid Curtis



Four vibrant, attractive concertos – three written within the past three years – by three

of Britain's brightest and best, and performed with dazzling virtuosity and musicianship by Simon Desbruslais and the Orchestra of the Swan.

Desbruslais's tone is extraordinarily rich, as can be heard by the verve with which he plays his instruments – the piccolo trumpet in the seven-movement concertino *Skyspace* 



Sharp and lively: Nicholas Collon conducts his Aurora Orchestra at LSO St Luke's, the venue for its series of 'road trip' concerts

(2012) by one of the composers-of-the-moment, Deborah Pritchard (*b*1977), the flugelhorn in the *Andante* of McCabe's *La primavera* (2012) – and the various mutes and tonguings each composer requires. Pritchard, whose violin concerto *Wall of Water* was premiered in London last October, has 'a synaesthetic approach to composition', vividly illustrated in *Skyspace*'s movement titles as they flit by, such as 'Aurum Resonance', 'Light Iridescent', 'Opaque' and the concluding 'Cerulean'.

Robert Saxton's Psalm: A Song of Ascents (1992) is effectively his first trumpet concerto, a single-span 'musical voyage' with resonances of his Jewish heritage. His second is the splendid Shakespeare Scenes (2013), which switches back through some of the most memorable of the Bard's inventions: Puck's putting a girdle round the world - evoked also in Henze's Eighth Symphony – as well as Falstaff, Lear's heath and Prospero's magic island. Best of all, though, is McCabe's La primavera, a paean to spring's 'exuberance and vitality of burgeoning new growth' which takes in a homage to Miles Davis and, in the finale, 'Quick', a veiled tableau vivant of the London Olympics. The concluding held note for the trumpet unaccompanied is just

one sign of his consummate mastery. A hugely enjoyable disc, strongly recommended. Guy Rickards

#### 'Road Trip'

Adams Chamber Symphony Baillie Intro:
I Sallied Out. Passing Places Copland
Appalachian Spring Ives Three Places in New
England - The Housatonic at Stockbridge Simon
Hearts and Bones (arr Muhly) Traditional The
Brown Girl. Reynardine (both arr Muhly)
Sam Amidon voc/gtr Dawn Landes voc
Aurora Orchestra / Nicholas Collon
Warner Classics © 2564 63279-1 (68' • DDD)



The imaginative, bright young resident ensemble at London's Kings

Place launch their Warner Classics contract with what we used to call a 'concept album' based on a concert programme. The theme is a series of adventures and images of life on the road, mostly North American save the traditional folksongs 'Reynardine' and 'The Brown Girl'. The chamber orchestral works – the Ives and the Copland both appear in their reduced versions – are interspersed with songs sung by Sam

Amidon and Dawn Landes but brought gently into the orchestral context by the arrangements of contemporary American composer Nico Muhly.

Mixed concert programmes often become less satisfying and more abstract on CD. In this case, the choice and placing of Adams's *Chamber Symphony* – where Schoenberg's identically titled Op 9 is aurally combined with overheard cartoon music – opens up a window for revaluing the achievements of Copland's Martha Graham ballet as more than a seed bed for the 'Lord of the Dance' melody, as well as drawing attention to Ives's layered tone portrait of the river. All the orchestral performances are sharp, lively and (in the case of the Adams) impressively funky.

The choice of folksongs is also an acute one, although Amidon's interpretations are really too neutral to do justice to the characteristic irony present in Paul Simon's own performance of the bittersweet portrait of a marriage fading and reviving or to match the sheer fear that Fairport Convention bring to the traveller-eating werefox Reynardine. Landes's 'The Brown Girl' is more successful in its detachment. This reservation aside, warm recommendations for both repertoire and realisation. Mike Ashman

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# Tchaikovsky's First Piano Concerto

Kirill Gerstein tells Jeremy Nicholas how a new edition is closest to the composer's intentions

ave a look at this.' The genial Kirill Gerstein, armed with a glass of Barolo, fires up his iPad in a trendy central London cafe. On the screen is the score of Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto No 1, Op 23. Nothing unusual about that, you might think, except that this is a new critical edition of the old warhorse which few have yet seen or heard. It is based in large part on Tchaikovsky's own conducting score, which was located in St Petersburg and only recognised as such in the 2003 (revised 2006) catalogue of his works. This is the same score from which he conducted the concerto on October 28, 1893, the date of his last concert. He died nine days later.

Until now, there have been three different versions of Op 23. The first is Tchaikovsky's 1875 autograph score of the original (and the autograph of the two-piano version). From this, a copy was hastily produced for Hans von Bülow's premiere performances in Boston. 'This was made in Moscow by copyists – some of whose hands are recognisable – who were close to Tchaikovsky,' reveals Gerstein. 'That's when the early copy of the orchestral score was prepared, the one that is now in the Staatsbibliothek, Berlin. The orchestral parts and a handwritten copy of the score went with Bülow to the States, but the score was not published.'

Shortly after completing the work, Tchaikovsky began to think that there were some places that could be improved, despite his declaration to publish the concerto exactly as it stood after Nikolay Rubinstein's famous condemnation of the entire work. Gerstein explains, 'The differences between the first and second versions are not of a fundamental kind, being mostly concerned with practical improvements either suggested by Tchaikovsky himself, by his pupil Sergey Taneyev, by Liszt's pupil Karl Klindworth, or by Edward Dannreuther, who gave the English premiere in London.' This is the second version, published in 1879, which Tchaikovsky himself conducted on a regular basis.

What he did not conduct was the third version, the version which most pianists play today. And although the first and second versions are relatively similar, there are significant differences between the second and third. 'We know from other Tchaikovsky scores', says Gerstein, 'that when he did make changes he always wrote to his publishers insisting that they were incorporated in future performances. So that's one good reason to disbelieve that the third version existed before his death. The concerto was a well-road-tested piece by 1893.



Passionate pioneer: the Russian-born American pianist has recorded the new edition

Another important reason is that publishing records prove that this version was printed outside Tchaikovsky's lifetime – and therefore without his approval.'

But now a new edition has been made, which, while based on the second version, takes into account all extant autograph manuscripts, numerous copies of the printed score and, most significantly, Tchaikovsky's own conducting score – making this the closest to the final known intentions of the composer. This is the version that Gerstein has recently recorded with the Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin under James Gaffigan. It forms part of an ambitious project by the Tchaikovsky Museum and Archive in Klin, Russia, to publish a new, complete edition of all of Tchaikovsky's works.

Noting that the old Augener two-piano score I have brought along retains the opening tempo as *Andante* (rather than *Allegro*) *non troppo e molto maestoso*, a hangover from a handwritten change inserted by Bülow, Gerstein then compares my (standard/third version) full score with the new edition. 'Look at the first piano entry with those famous chords. In the new edition, every second and third beat is arpeggiated. This gives a whole different metric impulse to



#### The historical view

#### Hans von Bülow The pianist's enthusiasm upon receiving the manuscript of the First Piano Concerto, 1875

'Your Op 23 strikes me as the most brilliant, most accomplished manifestation yet of that creative ability with which you have enriched the musical world...It is a veritable jewel, and you deserve the recognition of all pianists.'

#### Tchaikovsky

Letter to his patroness Nadezhda von Meck recalling Rubinstein's negative reaction to the concerto, 1878

A passerby could have thought I was a maniac, an ungifted and unthinking scribbler who had come to a famous musician to pester him with nonsense.

#### Neville Cardus The Manchester Guardian, 1936

A hackneyed battle-scarred work that usually has been hammered by the pugilists of the keyboard into cast-iron vulgarity...But the truth is that there are passages...so delicate...that they seem born of the purest fantasy.'

the orchestra and you find the strings play the melody with more musical flexibility. This tallies with the arpeggiated chords at bar 20 et seq., which are in every version. Also, the dynamic marking for the piano entry is *forte* in the second version, not *fortissimo* [as in the third version]. You find that if the pianist plays the chords *fortissimo*, the violins and cellos try to match that and play *fortissimo* instead of *mezzo-forte* as marked. These changes alter the mood of the piece.'

Gerstein continues: 'In the third version, there's a sort of romanticised *legato* slurring, but what Tchaikovsky often goes for is a certain *portato declamato*. You see this in lots of small differences of articulation in the orchestral parts. And look here at bar 63, when the opening theme returns with the piano playing dotted *fff* chords: an octave D flat in the left hand at the start of every bar. But Tchaikovsky didn't write that. He wrote an octave D flat for the first bar, a single D flat in the second, octave in the third, single in the fourth. There was a reason for this: he wanted the bars to be grouped in pairs and the second and fourth bars to be lighter. It also gives a reason for the pianist to talk to the timpanist and say, "Let's not have the same hits on every bar". Small difference, but it makes the whole thing livelier.'

Regarding the second movement, the central *scherzo* section is *Allegro vivace assai* in the second version, not *Prestissimo*. And among the discrepancies in the third version's finale is a cut in the middle episode that makes the section and the movement less balanced than in the original. 'And see here,' Gerstein points to the big octave passage leading up to the final statement of the second subject. 'What do you hear every

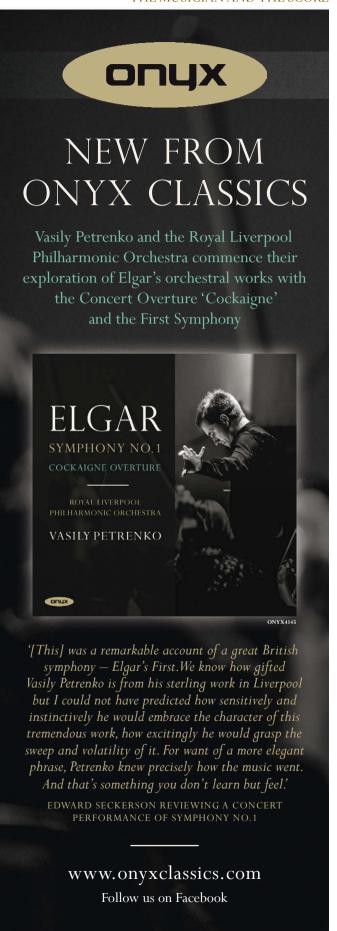
## 'Until now, no one has had the fortune of such detailed and widely resourced musicological research' – Kirill Gerstein

pianist do? Big octave jumps, *ritenuto molto* and a fermata before the *tutti* crashes in. None of these are in Tchaikovsky's score. He writes neighbouring octaves – without the jumps – like a slow vocal trill which then flows into the big tune without a pause.'

The finger of suspicion regarding the third/posthumous version with all these cuts and changes points towards Alexander Siloti, famous for the alterations he made to Tchaikovsky's Second Piano Concerto. 'Yes,' agrees Gerstein. 'There is correspondence proving that they discussed changes, under pressure from Siloti, but there is no evidence that these were ever authorised by Tchaikovsky.'

It is largely thanks to the work of Dr Polina Vaydman, chief editor of the Tchaikovsky edition and senior research fellow at the Tchaikovsky Museum and Archive, that we have all this new information. 'In 1986, pianist Lazar Berman recorded with Yuri Temirkanov what they believed was the authentic 1879 version,' says Gerstein, 'but this was the edition made in the 1950s by Berman's teacher Alexander Goldenweiser, who did not know of Tchaikovsky's own score or, it seems, of a copy of the first edition located in St Petersburg into which Tchaikovsky wrote a new version of the piano part in his own hand. Until now, no one has had the fortune of such detailed and widely resourced musicological research.' After 140 years, it seems we shall at last be able to hear what Tchaikovsky intended us to hear. **6** 

► To read Gramophone's review of Kirill Gerstein's recording turn to page 36



# Chamber



#### Richard Wigmore on Mozart Serenades from Scotland:

'Clarinets can be dulcet, as in the tenderly phrased Adagio, but are not afraid to rasp and bite' > REVIEW ON PAGE 57



# Harriet Smith listens to a new recording of Schubert's Octet:

'The group contrasts drama and fizzing ebullience with a real twinkle in the eye'

► REVIEW ON PAGE 58

#### **Beethoven**

'The Middle String Quartets'
String Quartets - No 7, Op 59 No 1; No 8, Op 59
No 2; No 9, Op 59 No 3; No 10, 'Harp', Op 74; No 11, 'Serioso', Op 95

**Cypress Quartet** 

Avie (B) (3) AV2318 (159' • DDD)



It isn't difficult to feel confident as the Cypress Quartet launch into the first

movement of Op 59 No 1. There is an ambience of breath and space as the cello theme unfolds at Beethoven's marking minim=88. Yet any suggestion of a comprehensive expressive range begins to fade as the response to a new theme (0'46") different in character, of falling and rising quavers to be played dolce, is muted. Less engaging is the trace of ponderousness in the second movement, Allegro vivace e sempre scherzando, and a constrained emotional commitment to essence in the slow movement, Adagio molto e mesto, its sublimity buttressed by the subheading 'A weeping willow or acacia tree over my brother's grave'. This for Beethoven was a rare outpouring of sadness - mesto - a term he had last used eight years earlier but now accentuated by a metronome indication of semiquaver=88 (he had put in precise numbers for all the quartets up to Op 95) which the Cypress don't ignore. But lines are short on nuanced shading; and brushed aside are the two immediate indicators of mood for all players, piano and sotto voce. The stamp of grief is diluted.

An unwillingness to play softly and convey delicate differences within a range of colours is an oft-repeated shortcoming. The slow movement of Op 59 No 2, marked *Molto adagio* and instructed 'to be played with much feeling', emerges defused of a raptness of feeling, subtle gradations of dynamics particularly from *piano* to *pianissimo* insufficiently articulated. The Belcea, achieving micro-variations in tone through masterly bowing and shrewd

voicing, create, at the same tempo, a poignant suspense that the Cypress cannot match. Their plain-speaking style carries an apparent refusal to reach into most of the music. Yet there are moments when they show promise, in the first and last movements of Op 59 No 3, and in Op 95, which stands well above the rest. Otherwise the Cypress don't straddle the tension between the heroic, the lyrical and the spiritual imbued in works forming a cosmos of their own. Nalen Anthoni

Stg Qts – selected comparisons:

Takács Qt (7/02, 5/05) (DECC)

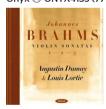
470 847-2DH2, 470 849-2DH3

Belcea Qt (1/13, 8/13) (ZZT) ZZT315, ZZT321, ZZT344

#### **Brahms**

Three Violin Sonatas. Scherzo, 'F-A-E', WoO2 **Augustin Dumay** vn **Louis Lortie** pf

Onyx M ONYX4133 (77' • DDD)



These impressive performances come into direct competition with the set released

last year by Leonidas Kavakos and Yuja Wang. Recorded rather more resonantly, Dumay and Lortie project the music with greater strength; we can imagine them playing in a spacious recital hall, whereas Kavakos and Wang suggest a more intimate ambience. Some listeners may find Dumay and Lortie's tempo changes excessive; in the first movement of Op 100, for instance, they occasionally slow down to a speed that's nearer to adagio than allegro. Yet one has to admit that these extravagances, if such they be, are always convincing. In Op 108's opening Allegro, the contrast between the spaciousness of the opening melody and the impetuousness of the loud music that succeeds it promotes a powerfully dramatic conception of this wonderful piece.

In one respect the new issue has, for me, a decisive advantage. Though I found much to enjoy in the Decca recording, I was troubled by Kavakos's mannerism of

separately articulating notes where Brahms has indicated a *legato* connection. Dumay, by contrast, clearly enjoys producing a smooth transition between the notes of a *legato* phrase, getting us to appreciate its shape and expressive content – for example at the start of Op 78's finale. And there's no denying that Dumay is a player who can seduce his listeners by his beauty of tone – distinctive for its warmth and luminous clarity. Lortie, with a similarly persuasive *legato* touch, and able fully to support the music's moments of mystery or grandeur, makes an ideal partner.

#### **Duncan Druce**

Vn Sons – selected comparison: Kavakos, Wang (7/14) (DECC) 478 6442DH

#### **Brahms**

Three Piano Trios (two versions of No 1, Op 8) Oliver Schnyder Trio

RCA Red Seal © 2 88843 09542-2 (122' • DDD)



A feature of this issue is the inclusion of both versions of the Op 8 Trio – the original of

1853-54 and the extensive revision made long after, in 1889. In recasting the work, Brahms left the impressive main ideas of each movement more or less unchanged; but in the first movement, *Adagio* and finale he recomposed most of the contrasting material, making it more succinct and more relevant to the main argument. Even if the Trio's early version tends to sprawl, it's still good to hear its fascinating byways, especially the unexpected quicker section towards the end of the *Adagio*, and to be able to compare it to the later achievement.

The Schnyder Trio give performances notable for their verve and enthusiasm. Many movements benefit strongly from this approach: the *Scherzo* of Op 8, for instance, with its quicksilver piano runs and eager violin and cello entries, and Op 87's finale, done with considerable panache, admirably sustaining the movement's *giocoso* character. The trio's 'no holds barred'



Brahms with brilliance: Andreas Janke (violin), Oliver Schnyder (piano) and Benjamin Nyffenegger (cello) play the complete trios, including both versions of Op 8

approach results in an extremely exciting performance of Op 101's passionate first movement; Brahms appears almost beside himself with agitation. If we turn to Nicholas Angelich and the Capuçon brothers (their fine set includes just the revised version of Op 8) we find their more moderate manner makes of the movement something more rich and varied. Whereas some of Schnyder's big chords tend to sound too forceful, Angelich manages throughout to keep a rounded sonority. And generally, throughout the trios, the Capuçons and Angelich, by taking more time, are able to explore in greater detail the character of each movement's succeeding episodes.

In the wonderful *Andante* with variations in the Op 87 Trio, the Schnyder performance is smooth and expressive, much of it sounding truly beautiful. But, taking only slightly longer, Angelich and his colleagues bring out its dark, Magyar feeling in a way that's only hinted at by the Schnyders.

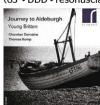
To sum up, the Oliver Schnyder Trio offer playing that's often thrilling in its brilliance and intensity, with a most sympathetic and convincing account of Op 8's first version, but it still wouldn't be my first choice. **Duncan Druce** 

gramophone.co.uk

Pf Trios – selected comparison: Angelich, R & G Capuçon (8/04) (VIRG) 545653-2

#### Britten

(63' • DDD • resonusclassics.com)



It might have seemed that there could not be any more early works by Britten

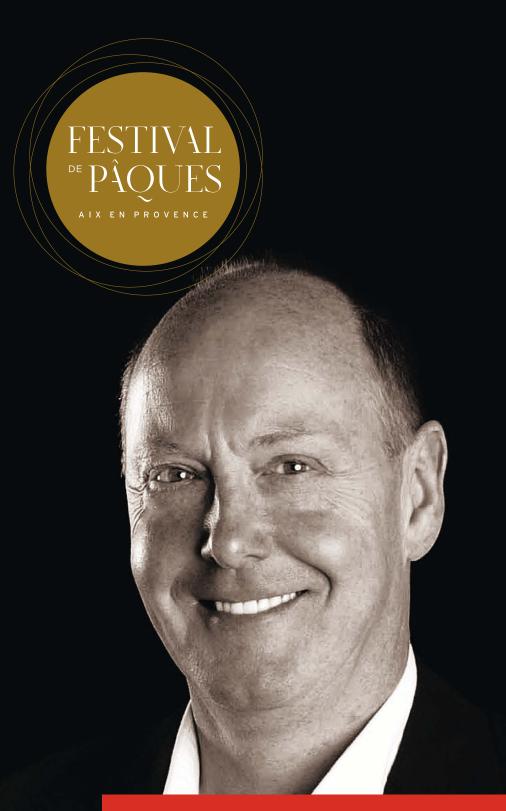
waiting to be discovered but the pile of juvenilia in the safe keeping of the Britten-Pears Foundation is huge. 'Journey to Aldeburgh' features three of these early works in first recordings, of which at least one is well worth hearing. This is the Introduction and Allegro for piano trio, written in 1932, which has a memorably hypnotic opening setting the listener up for some sensitively coloured writing, intermittently under the influence of Ravel. It could make a nice addition to the piano trio repertoire. Of the other two, both of

them brief, the elegiac *The Moon* for violin and piano is of minor interest, the bustlingly inconsequential Allegro for piano probably not even that. Each, though, gets a performance worthy of the occasion from members of Chamber Domaine.

That is not all. There is also the first recording of Britten's arrangement for instrumental ensemble of Bridge's There is a willow grows aslant a brook. Made for the Aldeburgh Festival in 1948, this arrangement for 12 players (described simply as 'unpublished' in the Britten Thematic Catalogue) is not to be confused with Britten's other arrangement for viola and piano, already available on two discs entitled 'Reflections' (Naxos, 2/14; Nimbus, 7/14). Its haunting and imaginative instrumental colourings, a deft example of Britten's skill with a limited palette, is even more appealing. These novelties are probably enough to recommend Resonus's recording but there are also lively performances of the spiky Suite for violin and piano, Op 6, from 1935 and the rather more familiar Sinfonietta, Op 1, from Chamber Domaine under director and violinist Thomas Kemp. An enterprising selection.

Richard Fairman

GRAMOPHONE FEBRUARY 2015 51



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As good as it gets: the Ensō Quartet join pianist Gottlieb Wallisch to record Dohnányi's piano quintets for Naxos

#### Dohnányi

Piano Quintets - No 1, Op 1; No 2, Op 26 Gottlieb Wallisch p/ Ensō Quartet Naxos ® 8 570572 (54' • DDD)



Two composers in particular spring out as influences on these two very different

quintets: Schumann in Op 1, most specifically in the *Scherzo*, at 1'59", where there are unmistakable echoes of the Lied 'Du bist wie eine Blume', and the songlike cello opening of the *Adagio*, which recalls the musical and emotional climate of Schumann's Piano Quartet. As assured as this enjoyable work is, you sometimes sense that Dohnányi is parading his academic credentials for the sake of his teachers and peers, the fugato at 2'29" into the finale for example, which nonetheless soon starts to dance.

How different the fugal opening of Op 26's expansive finale, which seems to have absorbed Beethoven's Quartet Op 131, or aspects of it, though the predominant influence in this later – and musically superior – work is Brahms, the Intermezzo second movement being the

most obvious case in point, its mood, melodic drift and contrapuntally flavoured piano-writing, not to mention the alternation of slow and fast episodes, though the very individual colouring later on is very much Dóhnanyi's own.

This particular coupling, which was recorded in Toronto back in May 2007 and features performances that are astutely musical and very well executed, is about as good as it gets, in spite of some strong competition, especially from Martin Roscoe and the Vanbrugh Quartet (ASV). In the First Quintet there's a fine alternative by the Takács Quartet with András Schiff (Decca), which regrettably suffers from a rather over-resonant recording, while in the Second Ernő Szegedi with the Tátrai Quartet (Hungaroton) is less fluent than either Wallisch with the Ensō String Ouartet or Roscoe and the Vanbrughs. Lydia Artymiw and the Audubon Quartet (Centaur, again with both Quintets coupled) effectively capture the First Quintet's stormy spirit, though the balance between piano and strings on this new disc is better. Which, given the modest price point and all-round musical excellence, more or less suggests a top recommendation for the CD under review. Rob Cowan

Selected comparisons – coupled as above:
Roscoe, Vanbrugh Qt (5/95) (ASV) → CDDCA915
Artymiw, Audubon Qt (CENT) CRC2503
Pf Qnt No 1 – selected comparison:
Schiff, Takács Qt (12/88) (DECC) → 421 423-2DH
Pf Qnt No 2 – selected comparison:
Szegedi, Tátrai Qt (HUNG) → HCD11624

#### **Fuentes**

Dunkelkammermusik<sup>a</sup>. Skifir<sup>a</sup>. Space Factory - III<sup>b</sup>; IV<sup>b</sup>; V<sup>b</sup>; VI<sup>a</sup> <sup>a</sup>PHACE / Simeon Pironkoff; <sup>b</sup>Ensemble Recherche Neos ® NEOS11409 (69' • DDD)



Arturo Fuentes is a Mexican composer born in 1975 currently living in Austria,

whose music has attracted sufficient attention to warrant performances from ensembles such as Recherche in Germany and PHACE in Austria (the latter, like the composer, being new to me). The six pieces offered here were all composed over the past four years (most are from 2012-13), they are for small chamber ensembles (two with added electroacoustics), and all last around 12 minutes. The similar time frame and forces may account for the fact that

they sound remarkably similar: for the most part the sound world is a lively, effervescent *perpetuum mobile* in which the acoustic instruments obsessively repeat short snatches of phrasing, sometimes punctuated by silence. They hover between pitch and noise most of the time and are given plenty to do, so as a musical surface it is rather enticing and unpredictable.

But over time predictability sets in after all, either because the repeated materials congeal into harmonic stasis or because their relation to each other yields no discernible tension over the mid-term or direction over the longer term. In Space Factory III a slow, wailing oboe line initially proposes something different – as does a kalimba in Space Factory IV - but the temptation of pedals soon wins out (there's an especially long one on G from the fifth minute onwards), as does the perpetuum mobile just before the conclusion. In Space Factory V and VI the electroacoustics function as a curtain through which the instruments emerge, but otherwise the gestural vocabulary changes little from work to work. The performances are as committed as one has come to expect from such musicians but the grit at the centre of this particular oyster eludes me. Fabrice Fitch

#### Graupner

Trio Sonatas - GWV201; GWV203; GWV207; GWV208; GWV210; GWV217 Members of the **Finnish Baroque Orchestra** Ondine ® ODE1240-2 (59' • DDD)



The 1990s fashion for dispensing as many recordings as possible of 'newly

discovered' Baroque music did not always guarantee the resurgence of long-hidden masterpieces: many had lain undiscovered for centuries with good reason. The music of the assiduous Christoph Graupner (who beat Bach for his job at Leipzig but was made an offer he couldn't refuse to stay where he was) is perhaps more worthy than that, though. Much of his output was closed to public scrutiny due to a dispute between his estate and the State for many years, and only became accessible once their differences had been settled and the manuscripts placed in the University of Darmstadt. Now that they are back in the public domain, the sprightly Finnish Baroque Orchestra has taken it upon itself to inject long-lost momentum into his reputation, and this third volume covers the trio sonatas with characteristic sunny countenance.

Although the continuo part is left largely unembellished, it is nevertheless markedly perky in its demeanour, which gives the music the sort of forward drive and animation that lifts the music into an entirely different league of engagement. Although it would be inaccurate to say that Graupner is equal to Bach (or any other 'great' composer with whom he is unlucky enough to be competing for notoriety), it is concomitantly fair to suggest that his neglect has been unwarranted artistically; and that fact, combined with the meticulous accuracy of blend and tuning (even in the sonata for chalumeau, the honking folk precursor to the clarinet), skilfully combined here with rustic highspiritedness, has created a disc as much pioneering as it is enjoyable. Caroline Gill

#### Grieg · Janáček · Wolf

Grieg String Quartet, Op 27

Janáček String Quartet No 2, 'Intimate Letters'
Wolf Italian Serenade

Amphion Quartet

Nimbus Alliance © NI6289 (67' • DDD)



These young players based in New York boast a formidable range of

accomplishments: perfect chording, beautifully matched tone, precise technical command and, as a group, a natural ability to shape the music elegantly and sensitively. Wolf's Italian Serenade has an admirable lightness, plus a wholly appropriate sense of fun. The Grieg is characterised by strong rhythms, energy and clear textures, bringing out all the harmonic coloration. What is less emphasised is the work's dark side, the sense of a threatening environment behind the human drama. The Vertavo Quartet, recorded in 1998, lack something of the Amphion's easy élan, especially in the finale's Saltarello, but they do project the gloomy episodes more convincingly as well as finding an authentic folk style for the third movement's Trio section and, crucially, providing an appropriate level of intensity for the major-key return of the motto theme in the final coda, where the Amphion fail to rise to the occasion.

The Janáček similarly offers vivid contrasts of colour and texture, the lyrical phrases beautifully turned, and well thought-out tempo relationships. But here, too, I felt something was missing. Where the Amphion value textural clarity, the Pavel Haas Quartet, producing a denser, more intense sound, give their performance

a compelling feeling of continuity. Especially in the finale, with so many apparently disjointed ideas, the more laid-back Amphion performance cannot match the Czech quartet's sense of triumphant resolution. For all that, this is an outstanding group from whom I'm sure we will hear a great deal in the future.

#### **Duncan Druce**

Grieg – selected comparison: Vertavo Qt (11/00) (SIMA) PSC1201 Janáček – selected comparison: Pavel Haas Qt (11/06) (SUPR) SU3877-2

#### Gubaidulina · V Suslin

**Gubaidulina** So sei es<sup>a</sup> **Suslin** Mobilis<sup>b</sup>. Sonata capricciosa<sup>c</sup>. Grenzübertritt<sup>d</sup>. 1756<sup>b</sup>. Capriccio über die Abreise<sup>e</sup>

Nurit Stark <sup>abe</sup>vn/<sup>cd</sup>va <sup>e</sup>Rebecca Beyer vn <sup>d</sup>Olga Dowbusch-Lubotsky vc <sup>ad</sup>Alexander Suslin db Cédric Pescia <sup>a</sup>pf/shpd <sup>a</sup>Taiko Saito perc BIS (F) BIS2146 (72' • DDD/DSD)



This disc supplements the recent BIS release of instrumental music by Sofia Gubaidulina

(A/14). So sei es – a 20-minute composition for violin and double bass with piano and percussion (2013) – has obvious affinities with the later pieces on the earlier disc. But its relatively diffuse character perhaps reflects its role as a memorial to Viktor Suslin, with whom Gubaidulina worked in both the Soviet Union and Germany as part of an ensemble dedicated to group improvisation.

Suslin (1942-2012) seems to have been publisher, performer and professor as well as composer, a diversity which might explain the unusual mix of the experimental and the conventional in his music. Forays towards the microtonal aspects of spectralism are set against what sounds like an impatience with minimalism's jovial consonances, which Suslin felt obliged to satirise. The mix doesn't always come off: the strenuously repetitive Grenzübertritt outstays its welcome and the Sonata capricciosa fizzles out in rather aimless reticence. However, 1756 for solo violin celebrates the lost world of melancholic Mozartian refinement without implying wholesale rejection of the possibilities inherent in musical modernism, managing thereby to match some of Schnittke's and Guibaidulina's most memorable works; two other Suslin pieces, Mobilis and Capriccio über die Abreise, come across no less effectively.

As for the acceptance of fate implied by Gubaidulina's title – 'so be it' –



Wholly engaging: members of the Parisii Quartet and friends meet the virtuoso demands of the French composer Laurent Lefrançois with spirit

submissiveness doesn't prevent the music abandoning reflective lyricism for explosive assertiveness from time to time. That the double-bass player is Viktor Suslin's son adds pertinence to the performance, and the whole disc is well projected, especially by violinist Nurit Stark, in strongly etched recordings. Arnold Whittall

#### Lefrançois

'Balnéaire - Chamber Music'
Sextuor mixte<sup>a</sup>. Padouk phantasticus<sup>b</sup>. Toccata sesta d'après Frescobaldi<sup>c</sup>. Approaching a City<sup>d</sup>. Erinnerung<sup>c</sup>. Le nouveau balnéaire<sup>e</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Magali Mosnier fl<sup>d</sup>François Meyer ob

<sup>abd</sup>Paul Meyer ol d'Gilbert Audin bn

<sup>ae</sup>Cyril Guillotin, enima Sarkechik pf

<sup>b</sup>Ria Ideta mari members of the 'Parisii Quartet

Evidence © EVCD005 (50' • DDD)



It would be hard and probably undesirable to pin any sort of label on the music of

Laurent Lefrançois, the French composer born in 1974. Each of the pieces on this disc seems to be stylistically self-contained. There are nods to the milieu of Les Six and other French composers in the *Sextuor* 

mixte (2003) for flute, clarinet, violin, viola, cello and piano, though the booklet-note writer points to the influence of Janáček. If that is so, it is a Janáček with a very pronounced Gallic accent, shot through with idioms and rhythmic cunning characteristic of propulsive minimalism.

Set against that, the Toccata sesta d'après Frescobaldi (2013) is a free arrangement for string quartet of an early-17th-century Frescobaldi organ miniature (about five minutes long), in which Lefrançois pays homage to Frescobaldi's own originality in terms of harmony and free-flowing ideas rather than using it as a springboard for any modern embellishment. As Lefrançois says, 'I refer to the past through appropriation and do not wish to make a clean sweep of everything I love. Rather than the iconoclastic acts favoured by the post-war serial school, I prefer securing my musical language to the works of all the masters I rub shoulders with every day through concerts or the study of scores.' By contrast, however, Erinnerung (2007) for string quartet makes references to Mozart in the context of an at times Bartókian astringency. The variety here is engaging and the music's virtuoso demands are fully met by the spirited performers.

**Geoffrey Norris** 

#### **D** Matthews

'Complete String Quartets, Vol 3' **D Matthews** String Quartets - No 1, Op 4;
No 2, Op 16; No 3, Op 18. Mirror Canon **Scriabin** Prelude, Op 74 No 4 (arr D Matthews) **Kreutzer Quartet** 

Toccata Classics © TOCC0060 (64' • DDD)



David Matthews's purposeful, imaginative and inventive music has

rightly gained its own following, which the Kreutzer Quartet's excellent cycle of his string quartets (14 numbered examples to date) is doing much to consolidate. This third volume returns us to the first three numbered quartets. But there is nothing tentative or, on the other hand, exaggeratedly flamboyant about these relatively early works. Partly, no doubt, that is because they were preceded by three discarded attempts in the genre. Beside certain of his European contemporaries the timbral and harmonic sound world is decidedly conservative - but unapologetically so, and rightly unapologetically so, because the music radiates a sense of purpose and goal-





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#### Sylvain Cambreling

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- Principal Conductor: Yomiuri Nippon Symphony Orchestra
- Principal Guest Conductor: Klangforum Wien

#### Alpesh Chauhan

 Assistant Conductor: City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra

#### Michael Collins

 Principal Conductor: City of London Sinfonia

#### Andreas Delfs

 Conductor Laureate: Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra

#### Matthew Halls

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#### Christian Kluxen

• Dudamel Fellow: Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra

#### Stephen Layton

- Artistic Director and Principal Conductor: City of London Sinfonia
- Director: Polyphony
- Director of Music: Trinity College, Cambridge
- · Artistic Director: Holst Singers

#### Andrew Litton

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- · Music Director: Colorado Symphony
- Artistic Director: Minnesota Orchestra
   "Sommerfest"
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#### Grant Llewellyn

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directedness that brings its own rewards, even if the particular works on this disc strike me ultimately as near misses rather than bullseyes.

The influences Matthews declares in respect of his First Ouartet come from Bartók, Tippett, Berg, Schoenberg and his teacher Nicholas Maw, and there is an actual quotation from Beethoven's Piano Sonata Op 110. This last is well enough integrated that it only jumped out at me on third hearing - less owing to my inattention, I think, than to my absorption in the wealth of ideas surrounding it. Whether the piece adds up to more than the sum of its parts – and it certainly feels like it is intended to – I'm not so sure, even after four hearings. The two and a halfminute concluding Allegro feels a little lightweight to achieve that.

In addition to all the above-named affinities. Matthews could not have been assistant to Britten for four years without something of the language and craftsmanly resourcefulness rubbing off, which is entirely a positive thing. His 'commitment to a music that is...connected to the vernacular' is less easy to spot. He mentions that the central Scherzo of the three-movement Second Ouartet is 'influenced by The Who and The Velvet Underground' but he might equally well have cited Tippett's Second Symphony. Be that as it may, the movement certainly punches above its weight. I'm less sure that the longish Elegy finale is sufficiently concentrated in invention to hold the attention, for all its textural fascination (shades here of Peter Sculthorpe, another credited influence).

The Third Quartet begins with a rocket-like gesture (out of Stravinsky's *Symphony in Three Movements?*). Thereafter Matthews risks a calculated process of 'gradual slowing-down and loss of momentum', and again I'm not sure he quite brings it off. By this stage I could not ward off a certain frustration at the music's not staying longer with an idea in order to get the maximum juice out of it; and while its magpie quality may be engaging, it can also be a little irritating. An attractive, antique-sounding *Mirror Canon* and an arrangement of one of Scriabin's late piano preludes round off the disc.

Lithe, agile performances from the Kreutzer Quartet, cleanly recorded, give a strong sense of Matthews's musical profile and bode well for the (presumably two) remaining volumes. David Fanning

#### Mendelssohn

Piano Quartets - No 1, Op 1; No 3, Op 3. Largo and Allegro<sup>a</sup> Gabriele Pieranunzi, <sup>a</sup>Daniela Cammarano *vns* Francesco Fiore *va* Shana Downes *vc* Roberto Prosseda *pf* 

Decca/Discovery (F) 481 1214 (65' • DDD)



Roberto Prosseda has already been rattling his way through Mendelssohn's piano

music for Italian Decca, and here he is joined by colleagues for a second disc of the composer's early chamber music for piano and strings. It will come as a surprise to no one that the two piano quartets included on the release are jaw-droppingly precocious. The First dates from 1822, when Mendelssohn was 13, and, as the viola player Francesco Fiore's expansive and learned booklet-notes remind us, greatly impressed Goethe. The Third was composed two years later; the strange little three minute-long *Largo and Allegro* dates from 1820.

As one would also expect, the music is unfailingly elegant, urbane and enjoyable, even if I'm not sure it's always quite as interesting as Fiore suggests. However, this impression might in part be down to the performances, which, for all their sophistication and virtuosity, sometimes feel a touch bland. The engineering is clean and smooth, the string-playing reassuringly mellow, but Prosseda is sometimes in danger of going into virtuoso autopilot while reeling off the passagework and arpeggios that are such a feature, in the outer movements especially.

The greatest pleasures are to be had when those textures let up, such as in the wonderfully easy-going (and, as Fiore notes, Rossinian) second subject of the intermittently Beethovenian C minor First Quartet's *Allegro vivace*, or in its melodious *Adagio*. The larger-scale B minor Third Quartet is more structurally ambitious and its grand finale builds up an impressive head of steam in the hands of Prosseda and his colleagues. **Hugo Shirley** 

#### Mozart



Serenade No 11, K375. Divertimentos -No 9, K240; No 12, K252/240a; No 13, K253; No 14, K270

Scottish Chamber Orchestra Wind Soloists Linn (F) (Solo CKD479 (67' • DDD/DSD)



Mozart informed his father that he had composed the Serenade K375 'rather carefully' to impress Herr von Strack, a Viennese nobleman sporting the splendid title of 'Gentleman of the Emperor's Bed Chamber'. Whether in its original Sextet incarnation, performed here, or its later Octet version, this is music that both celebrates and, as Mozart surely knew. far transcends the tradition of al fresco Harmoniemusik. If you know the more familiar Octet version, you might regret the loss of the oboes' pungent dissonances near the opening, or of the oboe-clarinet dialogues in the Adagio. But the SCO soloists quickly allay any sense of deprivation. Like all the best ensembles in this music, they strike a nice balance between chamber-musical refinement and rustic earthiness. Natural horns lend a welcome abrasiveness to the tuttis; and the instrument's variegated colours give added piquancy to the horn tune that sails in out of the blue near the end of the first movement. Clarinets can be dulcet, as in the tenderly phrased Adagio, yet are not afraid to rasp and bite, to specially vivid effect in the sprightly second Minuet. Tempi are aptly chosen (the opening Allegro properly maestoso), and accompanying figuration lives and breathes, not least in the Adagio, where the horns inject delightful touches of jauntiness into the poetic reverie.

The four Salzburg divertimentos for wind sextet of 1776-77 are far slighter. Yet each reveals the craftsmanship Mozart lavished even on trifles for Archbishop Colloredo's dinner entertainment. The excellent booklet-notes fail to disclose why the Scottish players opt to perform the divertimentos with clarinets rather than the prescribed oboes. Still, while I missed the oboes' pastoral plaintiveness in movements such as the opening siciliano of K252, the sensuous warmth of the clarinets is fair compensation in the mellifluous A flat major Trio, or the Adagio of K253. Again the players balance polish, poetry and sheer bucolic enjoyment. The rare example of a Mozartian polonaise in K252 goes with a jaunty swagger (other performances I've heard are rather more decorous), while the lusty contredanse finales exude an impish glee. I fancy Mozart would have smiled in approval. Richard Wigmore

#### Penderecki



'Chamber Works, Vol 1'

Three Miniatures<sup>a</sup>. Cadenza<sup>b</sup>. Ciaccona in memoriam Giovanni Paolo II<sup>c</sup>. Per Slava<sup>d</sup>. Capriccio per Radovan<sup>e</sup>. Prelude<sup>f</sup>. Sextet<sup>g</sup>

 $^{
m afg}$ Roman Widaszek  $_{\it Cl}$   $^{
m eg}$ Tadeusz Tomaszewski  $_{\it Pl}$ 

 $^{\rm bcg}$ Maria Machowska  $v\!n\,^{\rm cg}$ Artur Rozmysłowicz  $v\!a$ 

dg Jan Kalinowski vc ag Marek Szlezer pf Dux (E) DUX0780 (61' • DDD)

gramophone.co.uk GRAMOPHONE FEBRUARY 2015 57



Most of the works on this disc are relatively recent but it begins with the highly

enjoyable *Three Miniatures* for clarinet and piano, which date from 1956. Their concision of utterance is something that one might wish the composer had retained in some of his later music; but that is not a criticism I would make particularly of the works included here, all of which, with the exception of the Sextet, are concentrated and of brief duration.

There are virtuoso presents to performers, such as the Capriccio per Radovan (2012), written for the dedicatee of Penderecki's Horn Concerto (2008), Radovan Vlatković, and Per Slava (2008), for Rostropovich, and other gifts and tributes. The Prelude for solo clarinet, for example, was written in 1987 as a gift to Paul Patterson (the composer's name has been accidentally omitted in the English translation of Marcin Krajewski's detailed booklet-notes but it is there in the Polish), all outstandingly performed by these six Polish musicians who come together in the substantial Sextet, completed in 2000. This is an intriguing and unusual work, new to me. Krajewski rightly points out its connection with Schubert's Octet, Beethoven's Septet and, chiefly, Shostakovich. Much of the material sounds like a distant echo of the Russian composer although it is put to quite different use in general, though some obsessive moments in the first movement and the dance-like material of the second are sufficient to suggest a deliberate homage.

These fine performances have been excellently recorded at the European Music Centre in Lusławice, and heard together in this way cast an unusual and fascinating light on Penderecki's work. Highly recommended.

Ivan Moody

## Rachmaninov · Shostakovich

Rachmaninov Eleven Songs Shostakovich Fifteen Preludes, Op 34 (all transcr Urasin) Boris Andrianov vc Rem Urasin pf Ouartz (© OTZ2107 (51' • DDD)



The prize-winning Russian cellist Boris Andrianov here offers a programme of

Russian music in transcriptions for cello

and piano. Shostakovich's Op 34 is a collection of pieces for solo piano very typical of the young composer, many with his characteristic sparkle. They have been transcribed for violin and piano several times but here the transcriptions of Rem Urasin (who also accompanies) are most imaginative, often giving the piano contrapuntal lines against the cello.

The sequence chosen heightens the contrasts delightfully, so Prelude No 3 in G leads up to a powerful *fortissimo* after a reflective start, followed by a dashing *Scherzo*, very brief, and on to a jaunty March. The eighth Prelude in the sequence, in the rare key of E flat minor, is powerful in its lyricism, bringing the biggest climax, to provide a central focal point. Reflective and vigorous Preludes then alternate as in the first half, culminating in a deeply melancholy Prelude and a final jaunty conclusion.

The Rachmaninov transcriptions, labelled 'Romances', are of his songs, including some of the best-known such as 'Lilacs'. Both artists play with a red-blooded romanticism apt for this composer. One can almost hear the words of each song, mostly love songs. 'Lilacs' is most tenderly done, with fluttering accompaniment, while 'Spring streams' is wonderfully passionate, with a dashing piano part. Delightful too is 'On the death of a linnet', fading to nothing, while the whole sequence ends with wistful reflections in 'How fair this spot'. Altogether a charming disc, beautifully recorded. Edward Greenfield

#### Ruehr

Lift<sup>a</sup>. Second Violin Sonata<sup>b</sup>. Klein Suite<sup>c</sup>. Adrienne and Amy<sup>b</sup>. Prelude Variations<sup>d</sup>. The Scarlatti Effect<sup>e</sup> bcelrina Muresanu vn dEthan Filner va

ade Jennifer Kloetzel vc beSarah Bob pf Avie (a) AV2319 (68' • DDD)



Increasingly well represented on disc, Boston-based Elena Ruehr (*b*1963) has

maintained a steady chamber output – of which this selection of works from across 16 years (interestingly heard in reverse order) makes a positive case for her accessible yet never merely academic or reactionary idiom. Agilely combining trenchant virtuosity with keen lyricism, *Lift* (2013) is a telling study in cumulative momentum, while the Second Violin

Sonata (2012) offers a pertinent take on the fast-slow-fast trajectory with its discreet jazz inflections – not least the finale's Oscar Peterson homage. Klein Suite (2011) takes its cue from Bach's unaccompanied violin music over its eloquent then energetic movements, whereas Prelude Variations (2008) draws on two preludes and fugues from the '48' in a purposeful workout for viola and cello. In between comes Adrienne and Amy (2009), a 'sonatina' paying homage to composer Amy Beach and her biographer Adrienne Block in what is the deftest and most appealing piece on this disc. The Scarlatti Effect (1997) rounds off proceedings with its lively and resourceful take on the Baroque composer's keyboard sonatas, as subtly integrated into a tensile single movement whose elements of ritornello ensure a steady focus through to the incisive close.

Thus is music written, above all, for the pleasure of the performers – and the four featured here duly ensure that the performances are never less than pleasurable. The recording leaves little to be desired in its clarity and perspective, and this disc can be warmly recommended to musicians searching for some worthwhile new repertoire.

**Richard Whitehouse** 

#### Schubert

Octet, D803<sup>a</sup>. Quartettsatz, D703 **Edding Quartet**; <sup>a</sup>**Northernlight** PHI © LPH015 (67' • DDD)



It's good to have a reading of Schubert's Octet which explores it via the pungency

of period instruments. The very opening chord is lent a particular dark hue (which isn't just a matter of pitch) and the subsequent dialogue between wind and strings has a greater intimacy than in the Nash's fine version. The arrival of the Allegro after the first movement's slow introduction has a particular agility in this new reading, which has less to do with speed than the leanness of timbre. In the Adagio they take a more flowing tempo than the Nash, to great effect, Northernlight's clarinettist Nicola Boud giving the Gaudier's Richard Hosford a run for his money in sheer poetry. The darting Scherzo is another delight, all three wind instruments giving it a truly rustic edge, while in the finale the group contrasts drama and fizzing ebullience with a real twinkle in the eye, the chattering interplay



Performing 'with a vernacular accent': Trio Appassionata offer an all-American programme on Odradek (review on page 61)

between the instruments full of personality. And, once again, the pacing is spot on.

The Edding Quartet go it alone in the *Quartettsatz*. Their opening phrases are meticulously articulated and they're less pressed than some in their speed, giving the first violin theme instead a kind of lolloping quality. What I miss here, however, is an edge of hysteria, something the Takács convey unflinchingly, be it in the leader's shaping of that same theme or the barely contained violence of the cello at just past the minute mark. The Edding perhaps put more emphasis on the fragile beauty of the piece but as a whole they leave less of an impression than the Takács and the febrile Belcea. Harriet Smith

Octet – selected comparisons:
Nash Ens (4/89<sup>R</sup>) (ASV) GLD4005
Gaudier Ens (5/03) (HYPE) CDA67339
Quartettsatz – selected comparisons:
Belcea Qt (3/03) (EMI) 557419-2
Takács Qt (12/12) (HYPE) CDA67864

#### Schumann

Adagio and Allegro, Op 70. Fünf Stücke im Volkston, Op 102. Märchenbilder, Op 113. Drei Phantasiestücke, Op 73. Drei Romanzen, Op 94 **Marcin Zdunik** *vc* **Aleksandra Świgut** *pf* Fryderyk Chopin Institute (© NIFCCD701 (71' • DDD)



By the end of this programme of short works – most of which have little more than

five-minute spans of music - you can't imagine why Schumann didn't write more chamber works for cello. In conjunction with the piano, the cello feels like Schumann's most authentic voice, the instrument's deep lyrical sound revealing what lay behind the more excitable aspects of his nature. Nonetheless, in the music presented here, only Op 102 was originally conceived for cello, which accounts for why one doesn't hear a greater diversity of expressive techniques among the disc's prevailing atmosphere of reflective lyricism. Both the Drei Romanzen and Märchenbilder were transcribed by its soloist, cellist Marcin Zdunik, and are completely convincing, partly because of his respect for the music's original impulse. The Märchenbilder, for example, has the cello often in its tenor range, no doubt in reference to the piece having been written

The disc can't help but have a certain sameness that has to do with the nature

of the works collected here. At times, Schumann even seems to be writing the same work repeatedly, but doing so with so much ingratiating emotionalism that one can hardly complain. Luckily, the fairy-tale imagery in Märchenbilder has plenty of musical quirks that are particularly welcome late in the disc. Performance-wise, Zdunik is often alert to the music's passing references to opera recitative as well as the composer's characteristic songfulness. Few piano recordings of Schumann are as convincing as Aleksandra Świgut's playing here. And the youthful open-heartedness of the performers is essential to music that's far from being Schumann's most substantial, but can charm in ways that only that composer could.

**David Patrick Stearns** 

#### 'Berlin Counterpoint'

Barber Summer Music, Op 31

Beethoven Quintet for Piano and Winds, Op 16

Connesson Techno Parade

Poulenc Sextet, Op 100

R Strauss Till Eulenspiegels lustige

Streiche, Op 28

Berlin Counterpoint

Genuin © GEN14317 (75' • DDD)



#### Hans Gál The Four Symphonies

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In celebration of Hans Gál's 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary year, AVIE presents together for the first time, the first-ever recorded cycle of the Symphonies of Hans Gál, in a slimline, 2-CD set.

"Woods has done the music world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century a huge favour in making Gál

known to us ... The Orchestra of the Swan is a band of superlative players whose commitment to the music matches that of its leader and it shows in every note." – *MusicWeb International* 

#### Lift: Chamber Music by Elena Ruehr

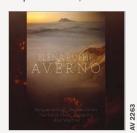
Irina Muresanu, violin • Ethan Filner, viola Jennifer Kloetzel, cello • Sarah Bob, piano



Solo and chamber works for strings and piano by Guggenheim Fellowship-recipient Elena Ruehr, all with references to older music in some way. The title track, for solo cello, was inspired by Nobel Prize-winner Malala Yousafzai, the Pakistani school pupil and education activist.

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- The New York Times



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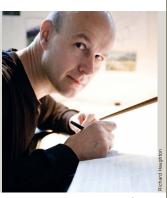
# THE CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER

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ELISE L. STOEGER PRIZE



The Stoeger Prize is given every two years in recognition of significant contributions to the field of chamber music. At \$25,000, it is the largest prize awarded for chamber music composition.



CMS Artistic Directors David Finckel and Wu Han commented on the announcement: "We are thrilled to present the Stoeger Prize to Thomas Larcher. As a composer of great achievement on canvasses both large and small, he merits specific recognition for his work in the highly concentrated art form of chamber music, for which his bountiful sonic imagination is tremendously well suited. We find his music deeply communicative yet uncompromising, essential qualities for the ongoing vitality of the chamber music tradition, so it is with great pleasure that we add his name to the already luminous roster of Stoeger Prize recipients."



This is a most attractive collection of performances from this excellent chamber

group. It opens with Poulenc's many-faceted Sextet for piano and winds, catching its high spirits as well as its wit, and the gentle melancholy which intervenes at the close of the boisterous finale. The stylish pianist, Zeynep Özşuca, nicely balanced, makes an excellent contribution to the central *Andantino*. She also contributes to the light-hearted Beethoven piano-and-wind Quintet, leading the way delightfully in the first-movement *Allegro* and playing with wonderful delicacy in the *Andante cantabile*. The finale romps away engagingly.

Guillaume Connesson has emerged as one of the most innovative of modern composers for wind instruments. *Techno Parade* is a brief one-movement work, full of innovative effects such as a fluttering flute against a similarly restless piano, with the three instruments creating nothing short of a musical frenzy. Samuel Barber's unpredictable *Summer Music*, rhapsodic and modal, returns us to musical normality. It is a touching work for wind quintet, with folk-like melodies evocative of the American South, enlivened by engaging irregular metres.

To offer Richard Strauss's Till Eulenspiegel to a sextet format of winds and piano seems daring, yet as scored by the flautist here, Aaron Dan, there seems to be nothing missing, even for listeners familiar with the orchestral version. Indeed, the narrative of Till's escapades is here recounted with remarkable immediacy, with every detail caught in the vivid, articulate and at times witty playing of all six artists, right up to the closing trial and execution. And the way Till finally cocks his snook at the trial is beautifully caught. Yet it is the piano and flute who have the last comment - 'He wasn't such a bad chap after all' - and one wonders whether the witty coda suggests that he escapes at the end. The recording is superb, wonderfully clear and immediate, very much in the demonstration bracket. Ivan March

#### 'English Music for Oboe'

Crosse Variations, 'Little Epiphany'a Dickinson Four Duos'a Dodgson Oboe Quartet'b Howells Oboe Sonatac Jacob Seven Bagatelles Sarah Francis ob 'aRohan de Saram vc' 'Peter Dickinson pf'b Tagore String Trio Heritage ® HTGCD275 (68' • DDD)
'From Hyperion ◆ A66206 (8/86)



This disc offers a splendid celebration of the artistry of the oboist Sarah Francis.

All but one of the works was written for her, while the exception, Howells's Sonata (1930), though written for Léon Goossens was never played by him, and the score only came to light through a photocopy owned by Christopher Palmer. Sarah Francis then gave the first performance in 1984.

Gordon Crosse's Little Epiphany is a spin-off from his orchestral *Epiphany*, developing the same material in a set of variations for oboe and cello. The main theme is a simple four-bar phrase, repeated at the end with a beautiful fading coda, making a substantial work of almost a quarter of an hour. Stephen Dodgson's Oboe Quartet is a much more compact work in three movements, the last of which sums up the argument on a more extended canvas. Peter Dickinson's Four Duos celebrates his artistic partnership with the oboist. Three of the movements use a tonerow from Ives's Three-Page Sonata but the writing is hardly at all atonal, with tonal passages punctuating the sections using the tone-row. The second movement is a slow piece conveying a sense of foreboding, while the fourth provides a jolly conclusion. Gordon Jacob's unaccompanied Bagatelles are a delight from first to last, written for Francis when she was starting her career, and bringing out the special qualities of the oboe masterfully.

Herbert Howells's Oboe Sonata is in four movements, the first two and last two linked. The first is marked *placido*, *teneramente*, a reflective piece leading into an even more lyrical, almost folk-like movement. The third is a *scherzo* culminating in an oboe cadenza with occasional chordal support from the piano. The closing Epilogue, marked *mesto*, then rounds the work off gently. It is hard to understand Goossens's failure to appreciate such an attractive, superbly written piece.

Sarah Francis shows her love for each work in the warmth of her playing, understandingly accompanied by her various colleagues. The recording of the Howells Sonata has been borrowed from a Hyperion disc, matching the excellent balance of the rest. Edward Greenfield

## 'Gone into night are all the eyes'

**Kotcheff** gone into night are all the eyes **Moe** We Happy Few **Kirchner** Piano Trio Ives Piano Trio
Trio Appassionata
Odradek (E) ODRCD313 (76' • DDD)



Any chamber music recording that's so forward-looking that the reward at the end

is Ives's Piano Trio deserves automatic respect. But that doesn't mean one will enjoy this challenging disc by Trio Appassionata. The group - consisting of violinist Lydia Chernicoff, cellist Andrea Casarrubios and pianist Ronaldo Rolim serves up an all-American programme that begins with the relatively friendly world premiere recording of Thomas Kotcheff's gone into night are all the eyes, with firstmovement keyboard-writing that recalls the Hungarian cimbalom, an explosive catand-mouse game in the second movement and then a final movement that enters more impulsive Messiaen territory. But aside from some thematic connections, these three movements don't seem to belong in the same piece. Eric Moe's 1990 We Happy Few, a one-movement work, comes off like an abstract argument among the three instruments, though one struggles to be engaged by what the argument might be about. In both works, the inner need to compose seems to take precedence over the need to communicate.

Though the works by Kirchner and Ives are in fact more dense and hard to parse, this is where the disc finds more solid ground. Even if you don't immediately apprehend the music, the compositional zeal has palpable charisma that makes repeated encounters with Kirchner, for example, a sort of wonderland of atonal simultaneity. The Ives Trio is a major American chamber work and a particularly characteristic example of the composer's art, with clouds of harmonic ambiguity recalling the American Impressionist painters with unpredictable mixtures of Americana songs such as 'My old Kentucky home'. But while the Beaux Arts Trio recording (found in the box-set 'The Philips Recordings 1967-1974') attempts to clarify what the music says, Trio Appassionata seem equally if not more interested in how the composer is saying it in a performance with a more vernacular accent. Therein perhaps lies the trio's limitation: it's so swept up in the physicality of performance that inner meaning becomes secondary. David Patrick Stearns Ives - selected comparison:

Beaux Arts Trio (1/76<sup>R</sup>, 6/85<sup>R</sup>, 2/05)
(PHIL) → 475 1712PC4

# HOTOGRAPHY: MARY SLEPKOVA/DO

# Grigory Sokolov

Harriet Smith enters the rarefied and reclusive world of the Russian-born, Italian-based pianist who shuns the studio and is known to music lovers mainly for his live recordings

In 2008 a change in the law meant that Britain was deprived of one of the world's most compelling musicians. For the introduction of biometric screening proved too much for the Russian-educated, Italian-domiciled Grigory Sokolov, who felt that his time would be better spent on music than

travelling to Rome every time he needed a visa, bringing to an abrupt halt an 18-year relationship with the UK's concert halls.

Grigory Sokolov's early life followed that of many prodigiously gifted Russian artists. He was born in Leningrad in 1950, three years before the death of Stalin. Showing

a precocious interest in music, he would conduct to all his parent's records, only ceasing when they bought an upright piano. He recalls that by the age of four he knew music would be his life. By seven he was at the junior school of the Leningrad Conservatoire, undertaking studies with teachers he described as 'proficient and intensive', something that continued into the Conservatoire itself. At 12 he gave his first major recital in Moscow. Four years later he took first prize at the 1966 Tchaikovsky Competition in Moscow. This was back in the day when competitions really did mean something. The previous winners at the Moscow had been Van Cliburn in 1958,

and in 1962 the first prize was shared between Vladimir Ashkenazy and John Ogdon. But these were artists in their mid-twenties; Sokolov was just 16.

And then? Silence. That's not strictly true, of course, but opportunities for touring were limited – though there were several to the States before the intensification of the Cold War soured relations with Russia in the early 1980s. Perhaps it was no bad thing, for it gave him vital time to mature and to extend his repertoire. A video of Chopin's Etude Op 10 No 8 from a concert in Finland in 1967 already shows prodigious technique and dramatic verve but it doesn't yet have the sheer poetry that we revere in his playing these days.

So what is it that makes him so remarkable? For a start, there's an element of unpredictability: not for him the trotting-out of an ever-diminishing range of repertoire. There's a thirst there, and some of the repertoire he

comes up with is remarkable for its unpianistic qualities, notably Byrd and Froberger.

He takes the score and runs with it. His famous – infamous to concert planners – reluctance to decide on a precise programme until the concert is virtually imminent is not the

result of an oversize ego but a simple need to play only what he feels close to at any given moment. Whatever he's playing, be it Couperin or Chopin, Beethoven or Prokofiev, he seems to have the ability to disappear into the world of each composer (he's at the opposite end of the spectrum to a Horowitz or a Kissin

in that respect), drawing out elements that you've never heard before, yet without sounding mannered. That is quite something. Take the Schumann Op 22 Sonata, for example, whose finale (as captured in 1988) is truly fiery. And as a bonus he also plays Schumann's original, discarded finale, longer and prodigiously difficult.

Of course such a purity of vision, such a single-mindedness, comes with its own demands: no piano more than five years old; no studio recordings; a significant amount of rehearsal and tinkering-with-the-instrument time (which is why he no longer performs with orchestras). We owe a debt to Opus 111's Yolanta Skura: she had the

foresight to commit to releasing Sokolov's live concerts, which form the bulk of his scant discography. DG was simply following in her footsteps when it announced last year an exclusive contract with Sokolov. The first release is of a recital nearly seven years old and two things particularly struck me: the first was how consistent Sokolov's vision of the Chopin Preludes was when you compared it with his earlier release on Opus 111; and, second, the glory of his encores, which perhaps sum up his sheer range of interests as well as anything: Rameau, Chopin, Scriabin and, to end, Bach.

Sokolov himself eschews the idea of belonging to a school, pointing out that anyone who could be described as 'Russian school' is by their nature too anodyne to be of much interest. And anodyne he certainly is not. Take something like the Brahms Op 117 Intermezzos from a 1987 Leningrad

He takes the score and runs

with it. Whatever he's playing, he has the ability to disappear into the world of each composer'

#### DEFINING MOMENTS

•1962

First recital in Moscow at the age of 12

•1966

Wins the International Tchaikovsky Competition, with the jury, headed by Emil Gilels, unanimously voting for him

.2008

Politics and music clash as a change in British visa requirements means Sokolov no longer plays in the UK

#### THE ESSENTIAL RECORDING



JS Bach
The Art of Fugue, recorded live in
St Petersburg in 1982
Opus 111 (№ ② →

OP30346

**62 GRAMOPHONE** FEBRUARY 2015



recital, released last year by Melodiya as part of a four-CD box of live recordings: they exhibit a barely contained grief, yet also palpable is an all-important Classicism. Then there is his famed *Petrushka*, which is never merely a thunderous display of power but operatic in its drama, the colours of the

more inward writing utterly inimitable. There's so much more to mention but to me it's perhaps his Bach-playing that is most extraordinary, and no one promises more than Grigory Sokolov in that rising fifth with which *The Art of Fugue* opens. **©** 

# Instrumental



#### Arnold Whittall reviews violinist Widmann's pairing of new and old:

'Ysaÿe sonatas are freshly imagined, instances of polished stability in the more turbulent seas which surround them' ▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 70



#### Jeremy Nicholas watches a batch of pianists performing on DVD:

'The spirit of their music-making is everything – and the Pekinels have that in spades' ► REVIEW ON PAGE 71

#### Chopin

Chopin Etudes - Op 10; Op 25. Trois nouvelles Etudes Lev Vinocour pf RCA Red Seal © 88725 46936-2 (59' • DDD)

#### Chopin · Schumann

Chopin Etudes - Op 10; Op 25 Schumann Etudes symphoniques, Op 13 Valentina Lisitsa nf

Decca © 478 7697DH (85' • DDD)





Two new sets of Chopin Etudes from two Russians. They're presented quite

differently, Lev Vinocour gravely introduced as 'a rare species: an intellectual virtuoso', whereas Valentina Lisitsa is subjected to the leggy blonde bombshell treatment and a pronouncement on the back that reads '85 minutes of romantically charged études'.

Neither of these images is accurate. There's no doubt that Vinocour has put a lot of research and thought into his readings, and he contributes a fascinating booklet essay. This research reveals itself in all sorts of ways, such as his fleet tempi for Op 10 No 8 and Op 25 No 4 or the rethinking of the so-called 'Butterfly', Op 25 No 9, which, as he points out, changes its character entirely when Chopin's forte and fortissimo markings are observed. But where Vinocour falls down is in matters of technique. The right hand in Op 10 No 2, for instance, just isn't as even as it needs to be; and too often there's a sense that he's right on the edge of his technique – in Op 10 No 8, where he sounds breathless and rushed; or in Op 25 No 11, which is a touch stodgy. Compare him to Sokolov here and you find so much more colour in the Lento opening, which precedes a scorching Allegro con brio.

There's no such concern with Lisitsa, who has technique in abundance and whose affinity for Chopin is well known. However, she is concerned less with virtuosity and more with revealing the music's contrapuntal intricacies, which she conveys very strikingly in études such as Op 10 No 7. The opening of the same set is also alluring in its colour and dynamic range, while Op 25 No 1 shimmers evocatively. At times she gets a little carried away, perhaps - her left hand in Op 10 No 4 is arguably overemphatic, while No 5 has none of the glistening airiness of Freire, Perahia or the youthful Pollini. But in the final number of the set she is wonderfully nuanced and reveals plenty of soul.

I have more reservations about her Schumann. For a start, Lisitsa seems to view it less as a coherent piece and more as a set of freestanding virtuoso études; the pianists listed below all offer more of a sense of a unified whole. As with the Chopin, Schumann's technical demands hold no fear for her (she's spectacular in numbers such as the Presto possibile of Etude No 9, though even here the insouciant ending is better conveyed by Romanovsky and Cortot). She also tends to be overly generous in her rubato, for instance in the theme itself and in the second and fourth posthumous variations. She takes the finale at a good lick, however, though I was left with the uneasy impression that she sees this as a showpiece, which it certainly isn't. But her Chopin Etudes are well worth a listen. Harriet Smith

Chopin Opp 10 & 25 - selected comparisons: Freire (8/02, A/05) (DECC) 470 288-2DH, 475 6617DSA Perahia (11/02<sup>R</sup>) (SONY) 88843 06243-2 Pollini, r1960 (1/12) (TEST) SBT1473 Sokolov (O111) OPS30-289 Schumann - selected comparisons: Hamelin (5/01) (HYPE) CDA67166 Anda, r1955 (2/04) (BBCL) BBCL4135-2

Romanovsky (DECC) 476 6208 Chopin

Chopin Etudes - Op 10; Op 25. Trois nouvelles Etudes

Cortot, r1929 (EMI) 704907-2

Zlata Chochieva pf Piano Classics F PCL0068 (64' • DDD)



A famous pianist (I shan't say who) to whom I was speaking recently said I really

should hear this young Russian pianist Zlata Chochieva in the Chopin Etudes. 'It is,' averred my informant, 'the greatest I've ever heard.' Quite a claim.

I've now listened to this disc several times and all I can say is that in each of the 27 studies Chochieva comes as close as anyone to how I hear the ideal performance in my head, or as I would wish to play them had I the ability to do so. Right from the opening C major study, as in many others, she finds some extramusical narrative beyond the text that I find profoundly moving. Taken as read are a superlative technique and an ideal recorded sound (from engineer Peter Arts). No details are overlooked yet without drawing undue attention to them: note the staccato markings of the A minor study (richly voiced by Chochieva, the left hand sounds almost like a plucked string bass) and also in the second subject of No 3, a good example of the meltingly lovely tone Chochieva produces. No 4, so often tossed off as a finger sprint (Richter, Cziffra), is given room to breathe while still being played presto and con fuoco.

I could go on picking out highlights from each study - the question-and-answer voicing in No 9, the subtle rubato in Op 25 No 1, the infamous studies in thirds and sixths in which, simultaneously, Chochieva reminds us of Chopin the contrapuntalist – moments and passages which made me listen afresh to these familiar works and, in some cases, hear things of which I had been previously unaware. The greatest on disc? I don't know; but it is certainly one of the most consistently inspired, masterfully executed and beautiful-sounding versions I can recall. Jeremy Nicholas

### **Glass**

'The Complete Piano Etudes' Maki Namekawa pf Orange Mountain Music ® ② OMM0098 (124' • DDD)



Full of rapid scale-like passages, sweeping arpeggios, syncopated rhythms

and repeating patterns, Glass's musical language seems custom built for the étude form. Maybe the biggest surprise is that he has taken until now to complete this set of 20 studies. In fact the first six or so date back to the mid-1990s, partly written in order to provide the composer with extra material for his solo piano tours but also as a pedagogical tool to develop his own technique. By the time Glass recorded the 10 Etudes that comprise Book 1, in 2003, he had already completed another six for Book 2.

The Etudes are therefore closely linked to Glass both as composer and performer; indeed, he has described them as selfportraits of sorts. However, there is little doubt that Maki Namekawa's superlative performances on this recording transport these pieces to an entirely new plane. Etude 2, which may be familiar to some readers in its arrangement for two violins and string orchestra called Echorus (the Etude came first, in fact), is a case in point. Despite being uneven and at times alarmingly imprecise, Glass's own recording shows plenty of weight and character, while Dennis Russell Davies's performance from the 2008 Ruhr Piano Festival seems restrained and detached. Namekawa manages to balance both passion and precision, shaping the Etude's oscillating patterns and resonant bass notes with sensitivity and control.

It's an aspect of her playing which features throughout the set. Etude 6 is equally effective; Namekawa imbues its binary contrasts with dexterity, poise and power. During the 10th she sounds simultaneously motoric and melodic, and in the 11th uses the instrument's full dynamic and colouristic potential. The Etudes of Book 2 are on the whole less virtuoso – Glass has described them as being 'about the language of music itself – and there are times when the music lacks the subtlety and spontaneity of the opening set, becoming increasingly trapped by its harmonic sound world. However, the very final Etude, modelled on material taken from Glass's music for Godfrey Reggio's film Visitors, is a work of extraordinary power and beauty,

at times quite unlike what one might expect from the composer. And with Namekawa at the piano, the set is worth buying for that Etude alone. Pwyll ap Sion

### Mozart

'Keyboard Music, Vols 5 & 6' Piano Sonatas - No 3, K281; No 4, K282; No 7, K309; No 11, K331. Adagio, KAnh206a. Romance, KAnh205. Variations - on 'Ah, vous dirai-je Maman', K265; on 'La belle Françoise', K353; on 'Salve tu. Domine', K398: K500 Kristian Bezuidenhout fp Harmonia Mundi M 2 HMU90 7529/30 (142' • DDD)

### Mozart



'Keyboard Music, Vol 7' Piano Sonatas - No 6, K284; No 8, K310. Variations - on 'Mio caro Adone', K180; on 'Lison dormait', K264 Kristian Bezuidenhout fp

Harmonia Mundi (F) HMC90 7531 (73' • DDD)





Mozart's solo keyboard music inhabits a somewhat isolated corner. Great Mozartians from Clifford Curzon to Alfred Brendel to Clara Haskil left surprisingly few recordings of the solo sonatas and variations, which is why Kristian Bezuidenhout's mandate to record all of them on fortepiano for Harmonia Mundi catches the attention. Hearing the discs themselves, one can hardly take one's ears off the performances because they go so far inside the music and reverse much of what you thought you knew.

Bezuidenhout seems to piggyback lesser works (variations) on to major ones (sonatas) by juxtaposing them together, paired according to similar chronology, revealing moments of synchronicity as well as dramatic leaps in Mozart's evolution. such as on Vol 7 when the 1773 Six Variations on 'Mio caro Adone' in G major, K180, are followed, in 1774, by the gargantuan theme-and-variations final movement of the Piano Sonata in D major, K284, showing Mozart working with an invention and rigour that almost sound like another composer. Elsewhere, though, Mozart's freewheeling variations, at least in these performances, are doorways into the composer's psyche in ways that the more formal, polished sonatas are not. The variations were like Mozart's secret garden, offering glimpses of his improvisatory spirit. Dare I say that Beethoven's Diabelli

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### **Chopin's Etudes**

Three recordings that came before Chochieva, Lisitsa and Vinocour, and how we rated them



AUGUST 2002

Chopin Etudes, Op 25

Nelson Freire pf

Decca © 470 288-2DH (59' • DDD) The Studies are quite exceptional in their care for articulation

and polyphonic voicing. We're not talking extraneous touches of arbitrary whimsicality; Freire's initiatives arise either directly from the notation or from his admirable sensitivity to harmonic tensions. Occasionally the effect borders on the didactic, as in his surprisingly emphatic way with the normally rather fluttery F major Study. But Freire's refusal to barnstorm through the three big concluding showpieces is welcome.

David Fanning



**JANUARY 2012** 

Chopin Etudes -Op 10; Op 25 (r1960)

Maurizio Pollini pf Testament M SBT1473 (60' • ADD)

Even when the easy majority

of great artists are often dismissive of their earliest recorded efforts, it is surely astonishing that Pollini could reject his early superfine brilliance, his aristocratic musicianship, his patrician ideal in the Chopin Etudes. Yet here, rescued by Testament, is a poetic intensity in the slower Etudes that later eluded him in his more objective DG recording. All lovers of great piano-playing will need to add this to their collection.

Bryce Morrison

### GRAMOPHONE OCTOBER 2013



Chopin Etudes - Op 10; Op 25 Jan Lisiecki pf DG (E) 479 1039GH (60' • DDD) When, if ever, have you heard the Chopin Etudes played as

pure music, given as naturally as breathing yet recreated from an entirely novel perspective? Lisiecki gives us tone-poems first and studies second, his technique as unobtrusive as it is effortlessly fluent, lissom and precise. DG has struck gold and I can only hope that such a perceptive, natural and unforced talent will remain untarnished by commercial pressures. Never for a moment would I want to be without celebrated recordings by Cortot, early Pollini, Ashkenazy and Perahia, but for a memorable musical recreation Lisiecki stands alone.

Bryce Morrison

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**GRAMOPHONE** FEBRUARY 2015 65 gramophone.co.uk

Variations came to mind repeatedly in these three volumes?

'When Mozart played a simple scale,' wrote Wanda Landowska, quoting the composer's contemporaries, 'it became transformed into a cavatina.' That sums up the Bezuidenhout difference. His typical Mozartian attributes include firm command of structure, great instincts for sympathetic tempi and a technique refined enough to get at the tiniest details - in contrast to Paul Badura-Skoda's more forceful but generalised fortepiano sonorities (Gramola). More distinctively, Bezuidenhout's elastic tempi give him room to probe for meaning but also allow panache that's so much a part of Mozart's buoyant temperament and prompts some delightfully elongated final cadences. Not only does one hear the notes with more transparency than on a modern instrument but one also gets a stronger sense of Mozart's larger world. Bezuidenhout's stealth weapon, though, may be the unequal temperament of his copy of an 1805 Anton Walter instrument. The popular notion that equal temperament reigned exclusively after JS Bach just isn't true. Experiments with alternative tuning – I'm thinking of Peter Serkin playing late Beethoven - can be colouristic revelations, which is also true of Bezuidenhout. So if you can only afford one volume of this series, which would it be? I refuse to say. Hear them all.

David Patrick Stearns

### Mozart

'Piano Works - Neglected Treasures' Suite, K399 (fragment). Sonata Movement, K312 (K189i/590d). Prelude and Fugue, K394. Andante, K616. Allegro, K400 (compl M Stadler). Variations on 'Unser dummer Pöbel meint', K455. Variations on 'Ah, vous dirai-je Maman', K265

Anastasia Injushina pf Ondine © ODE1250-2 (69' • DDD)



'Neglected Treasures' promises the CD cover. This is surely stretching a point with

the two variation sets, on 'Ah, vous dirai-je Maman' (aka 'Twinkle, twinkle, little star') and Gluck's comic aria 'Unser dummer Pöbel meint'. But only the most avid Mozart lovers are likely to know the wiry G minor sonata movement, K312, or the exuberant unfinished Allegro, K400, plausibly completed by Maximilian Stadler.

Equally rare are the neo-Handelian Suite, K399 (also unfinished), and the Bachian Prelude and Fugue, K394, probably inspired by Baron van Swieten's Baroque weekly matinees and Constanze Mozart's Bach-Handel enthusiasm.

Uninhibitedly exploiting the resources of the modern Steinway (no pussyfooting), Anastasia Injushina is an imaginative, often compelling Mozartian. The variation sets that grew out of Mozart's own improvisations come off especially well, with Injushina relishing both their extrovert brilliance and their textural subtleties. She is touching without affectation in the late Andante composed 'for a cylinder in a small organ', music whose rarefied simplicity evokes the B flat Piano Concerto, K595, and parts of Die Zauberflöte. For my taste, Injushina over-lards the Allemande and Courante of the Suite, K399, with soulful rubato (and, from her dreamy tempo, you would never guess that the courante derives from a running dance). The bounding momentum of K400, too, is compromised by moments of waywardness. These frustrations aside, there is far more to enjoy than to cavil at in this offbeat Mozart programme, truthfully recorded, not least in Injushina's boldly 'orchestrated' playing of the tense G minor Allegro - a tantalising fragment of what might been another minor-key Mozart sonata.

**Richard Wigmore** 

### **Piatti**

Twelve Caprices, Op 25

Carmine Miranda VC

Navona ® NV5972 (40' • DDD)



Alfredo Piatti, born in Bergamo in 1822, settled in London in the 1840s. Here, in

addition to his career as a virtuoso soloist, he became a renowned chamber musician, for many years appearing regularly in the Beethoven Quartet Society and Popular Concerts, where he played in string quartets led by Ernst, Joachim and Wilma Neruda. Joachim, especially, found him a valued colleague, engaging him for quartet concerts in Paris and Germany. These Caprices were published in 1875; though they all deal with advanced technique, they're not really in the tradition of spectacular virtuosity inaugurated by Paganini but rather suggest the approach of the Chopin Etudes, taking a particular aspect of technique - trills, string-crossing,

arpeggios with springing bow – and using it to make a piece with musical substance.

The Venezuelan-American player Carmine Miranda has recorded the Caprices without resorting to any edits; each piece is the product of a single take. Before I read this, I'd noticed the occasional moment of uncomfortable tuning; but really these imperfections are very slight and for him to record such difficult music in this way, with an intimate, close balance, is a remarkable achievement. And one really does experience something of the effect of live performance, recalling the immediacy (though not the sound quality) of the best solo recordings of the 78rpm era. The music, though not startlingly original - best, perhaps, not to listen to the whole set at a sitting – is inventive and appealing. Overall this amounts to a most attractive issue.

**Duncan Druce** 

### Rameau

'Pièces de clavecin, Vol 2'
Pièces de clavecin - Suite in A minor/major;
Suite in G major/minor
Steven Devine hpd
Resonus ® P RES10140



As with its predecessor (9/14), the second of four projected releases in this superbly

engineered download-only Rameau cycle features a clear, dulcet sounding 1636 Ruckers model harpsichord that befits Steven Devine's meticulous technique and thoughtful musicianship in the two 1731 Pièces de clavecin suites. His syncopated notes inégales treatment of the A minor Allemande and Courante differs from Mahan Esfahani's harder-hitting interpretation (Hyperion), while he favours a steadier, more grounded Sarabande. Devine's crisp and clipped 'Les trois mains' convinces less than Noëlle Spieth's suaver legato/detaché phrasing (Eloquentia) but his simplicity and breadth in the concluding Gavotte and Doubles complements Esfahani's faster, more ornamented traversal, as does the lilting deliberation of 'Fanfarinette'.

Esfahani sees 'Les Tricotets' as an upbeat toccata at odds with Devine's agogic rumination. If Devine explores the henclucking character of 'La Poule' less aggressively than in Jory Vinikour's deliciously brow-beating recording, his surprising and lovely changes of registration and rare B-section repeat reward no less. 'Les Triolets' again

### GRAMOPHONE Collector

## BEETHOVEN SONATA CYCLES

**Jed Distler** considers two sets of the 32 Beethoven piano sonatas – Pollini's near four-decade survey and Brautigam's fortepiano cycle



Forty years in the making: Maurizio Pollini's Beethoven sonata recordings are boxed up by DG

aurizio Pollini took nearly 40 years to commit all 32 Beethoven piano sonatas to disc, and almost no time at all for Deutsche Grammophon to release the cycle as a box-set. DG opts for later versions of the three sonatas that Pollini recorded twice (Op 22, Op 31 No 2 and Op 53), plus the studio Op 57 and Op 78 rather than their live 'bonus disc' counterparts. Despite the inevitable sonic variances, Pollini's sleek and unruffled technique, stylish intelligence and watertight structures appear remarkably consistent, and justify his reputation as the prototype modern pianist and ultimate role model for conservatoire students and competition contestants.

Yet, listening to the sonatas in the order that Pollini recorded them (rather than as numerically sequenced here), you'll notice that his Beethoven becomes increasingly angular, unfettered and bracingly communicative over time. For example, Pollini's 2014 Tempest (Op 31 No 2) is leaner, more sharply accented and contrapuntally complex than in his relatively generalised 1988 reading, while Op 31 No 1's first-movement broken chords playfully capture the composer's purported depiction of a pianist who can't keep the hands together, and the staccatos in Op 31 No 3's Scherzo have a lovely, woodwind-like edge to them. The little Op 79 from 1988 is a tad square and impersonal but the sonata's Op 49

### 'Ronald Brautigam's late piano sonatas are never less than masterful'

soulmates, recorded in 2014, are refreshingly wry and full of character. An impeccably chiselled 1988 *Waldstein* yields to this set's more robust live 1997 version.

Even when Pollini is most reserved, ear-catching details abound, such as his unusual stressing of the grace note in the Pathétique first movement's second theme, piercingly accurate double notes in the first movement of Les adieux, and the 'shock and awe' with which the pianist dispatches Op 28's deceptively tricky coda. Yet the first three sonatas fly off the page and foam at the mouth under the 67-yearold Pollini's impetuous fingers and put a more humane spin on that lofty, 30-something pianistic paradigm who set far-reaching standards in Op 111's chains of trills, Op 110's rapid left-hand figurations, Op 101's treacherous leaps and Op 106's endless challenges.

Although **Ronald Brautigam** is just a disc or two shy of finishing his complete Beethoven solo piano music survey for BIS, the label jumps the gun a bit, gathering all of the sonatas together in a box-set. And who can blame them, for much of the playing is sensational. Notice the pronounced rhetorical emphasis yet intensely focused dotted rhythms

in the *Pathétique*'s introduction, or the revelatory continuity from one variation to the next in Op 14 No 2's uncommonly quick central movement. Those who think that even Brautigam's sturdy Paul McNulty fortepiano cannot approximate an orchestra should check out Op 22's first movement, where the full-bodied octaves and brilliantly judged 'Rossini' *crescendo* just before the recapitulation make a pulverising impact.

And what about the Moonlight finale's controlled fury and slashing momentum that remain musical to the core, or how those Op 10 No 1 and 2 finales rock and roll while retaining maximum linear clarity? Few others rightly feel Op 10 No 3's Minuet as one beat to a bar and effectively spin out the left-hand counterlines. Among the heroic middle-period works, perhaps Brautigam's Waldstein and Appassionata make a cogent case for period instruments in regard to textural differentiation between registers, shorter pedal resonances, and being able to truly perceive rather than merely infer each pitch within low-lying chords and runs, abetted by Brautigam's subtle yet expressively powerful tempo modifications and telling accents.

Brautigam's late sonatas are never less than masterful, even if Peter Serkin's early-1980s Graf fortepiano recordings dig a little deeper. Compare, for example, Brautigam's overly loud, slightly glib Op 111 'Arietta' to Serkin's broader, more dynamically contained reading, or, in Op 110's finale, Brautigam's matterof-fact transition from the repeated G major chords into the fugue subject's inversion alongside Serkin's haunting tonal shadings, and you'll hear what I mean. Although I prefer Serkin's blunter, faster and edgier Hammerklavier, his admittedly problematic instrument gives way to the McNulty's shimmering damper and una corda pedal effects in the Fugue's hushed D major episode, the Scherzo's Trio and much of the slow movement. Don't be surprised if, when Brautigam completes his Beethoven project, BIS dumps it all in another big box and you're stuck with this one on account of my recommendation! 6

### THE RECORDINGS



**Beethoven** Complete Piano Sonatas **Maurizio Pollini** *pf* DG (\$\\$\) \& 479 4120GM8



**Beethoven** Complete Piano Sonatas **Ronald Brautigam** *fp*BIS ③ ⑨       BIS2000

illuminates the contrast between Devine's elegantly steady notes inégales approach and Esfahani's gentle rhapsodising. As much as I like Devine's subtle changes of touch in the repeats of 'Les Sauvages', I prefer Esfahani's more incisive linear projection. The assiduous mood shifts and amazing harmonic tension of 'L'Enharmonique' benefit from Devine's expansive eloquence and B-section repeat, as he stretches out the music to nearly nine blissful minutes. In sum, Vol 2 satisfies more consistently than Vol 1, and I'm curious to hear how the cycle's next instalments will play out. Devine provides his own informative, well-written annotations, available in PDF format. Jed Distler

Selected comparisons: Spieth (4/10) (ELOQ) EL0920 Esfabani (12/14) (HYPE) CDA68071/2

### **Scriabin**

'Complete Poèmes'

Deux poèmes, Op 32. Poème tragique, Op 34. Poème satanique, Op 36. Poème, Op 41. Deux poèmes, Op 44. Feuillet d'album, Op 45 No 1. Poème fantasque, Op 45 No 2. Scherzo, Op 46. Quasi valse, Op 47. Rêverie, Op 49 No 3. Fragilité, Op 51 No 1. Poème ailé, Op 51 No 3. Danse languide, Op 51 No 4. Trois morceaux, Op 52. Ironies, Op 56 No 2. Nuances, Op 56 No 3. Deux morceaux, Op 57. Feuillet d'album, Op 58. Poème, Op 59 No 1. Poème-nocturne, Op 61. Deux poèmes, Op 63. Deux poèmes, Op 69. Deux poèmes, Op 71. Vers la flamme, Op 72. Deux danses. Op 73

**Garrick Ohlsson** *pf*Hyperion ⊕ CDA67988 (80' • DDD)



Initially idolised by a small coterie, Scriabin was also vilified by those

who placed reason above passion, clarity above obscurity. Today he enjoys a near classic status and Garrick Ohlsson's disc of the complete Poèmes provides ample food for thought. Having notched up a huge array of recordings combined with an intensive concert career, his playing now reflects rich experience and musical quality. True, those accustomed to Horowitz's incandescent response to Scriabin's neurosis may feel themselves short-changed by Ohlsson's restraining hand, by a more settled view of an unsettled genius. But there are admirable compensations in playing that can contain even Scriabin's wilder, least accessible outpourings.

At the same time, even Ohlsson cannot entirely erase evidence of writing of such self-conscious liberation that it finally and ironically becomes caged in its own conventions. Whether frantic or remote, one poème becomes much like another and many of the composer's more bizarre titles and instructions ('Désir', 'Caresse dansée', 'Festivamente, fastoso', 'Etrange, capricieusement', etc) come to seem like a form of desperation, of special pleading in the face of public and critical bafflement. But whether in the Scherzo, Op 46 (jocular in an ironic sense), in the gazelle-like leaps of the Poème ailé, Op 51 No 3, or in the one substantial offering, Vers la flamme, you feel grateful for Ohlsson's refusal to indulge or over-reach. Finely recorded, his empathy with so many fragmented dreamscapes is lucid and sensitive.

**Bryce Morrison** 

### 'Bach to Parker'

JS Bach Solo Violin Partita No 2, BWV1004 Chaconne Borenstein Quasi una cadenza
Bowden Lines written a few miles below
Campbell Two Extremes M Davis Donna Lee<sup>a</sup>
Fujikura Kusmetche Hawkins Bobop Meredith
Charged Muhly A Long Line Sadikova
La Baroque Williams Mr Punch
Thomas Gould vn aDavid O'Brien db
Champs Hill © CHRCD078 (70' • DDD)



Bach is the arbiter of many good and different things, and it's no coincidence

that the only composers paired with any reliability in recordings with Bach – especially the solo violin works – are contemporary. Not only because Bach inevitably makes so many of his own contemporaries sound inferior when standing next to them but because he provides such a useful and often grounding touchstone for new music.

That theory only bears out, though, if the Bach is played as straightforward, accomplished and without overpowering ego. It's a relief, then, that Thomas Gould's opening performance of the Chaconne on his disc 'Bach to Parker' is just that - an admirable performance technically (with just enough of a stamp of his own personality to make it distinctive), the tempo relationships make sense, and his musical argument is intelligent but uncomplicated. It is, then, the proper arbiter of the good and different things that follow, in the form of new works that in some way reflect Bach's visionary sensibilities, from the evolution from

simplicity to virtuosity of Nico Muhly's compelling *A Long Line* (literally) to less conceptual references to the Chaconne such as the ghostly phrasing of *Lines written a few miles below* by Mark Bowden.

Champs Hill has proved itself reliable in backing winners among young musicians with particular potential for successful careers: all the new music on this disc showcases Gould's versatility at the same time as allowing his unfussy, unegotistical playing of the new music to burgeon. Long may that virtuous circle continue in his radiant playing.

Caroline Gill

### 'Etude'

Chin Piano Etudes Kapustin Five Etudes in Different Intervals, Op 68 Lyapunov Etudes d'exécution transcendante – No 4, Térek; No 5, Nuit d'été, No 6, Tempête Szymanowski Twelve Studies. Op 33

Clare Hammond pf

BIS (F) . . . BIS2004 (67' • DDD/DSD)



Simply entitled 'Etude', Clare Hammond's recital is gloriously deceptive.

For here is no familiar programme of Chopin and Liszt but an enterprising and enthralling challenge for both pianist and listener. Opening with Nos 4, 5 and 6 from Lyapunov's 12 *Transcendental Etudes* – a very Russian tribute to Liszt – Hammond then abruptly changes course with Unsuk Chin's six Piano Etudes (1995-2003) and a world that is 'abstract and remote' yet 'addressing the emotions and communicating joy and warmth'. Then follow Szymanowski's 12 Op 33 Etudes (already a far cry from the Chopin-inspired earlier set of Op 4) and, finally, Kapustin's *Five Etudes in Different Intervals*.

All this could set even the most intrepid virtuoso explorer (Marc-André Hamelin?) by the ears, yet Hammond's musical intention is always paramount. She storms Lyapunov's 'Térek' and 'Tempête' with full-blooded romanticism and finds all the sultry and romantic atmosphere of 'Nuit d'été'. If Chin's Etudes betray the influence of her teacher Ligeti, they are also highly individual and distinguished, their often playful quality ironically surfacing through a formidable intricacy. Memories of earlier work (the monstrous Second Sonata) flicker through Szymanowski's Etudes as well as other composers' (Scriabin's double-note Study, Op 8 No 11), while Kapustin recalls Debussy ('Pour les octaves' and 'Pour les notes répétées'). More to the point,



Outstandingly enterprising: Carolin Widmann pairs Romantic sonatas for solo violin with contemporary works for the instrument (review on page 70)

Hammond plays with unfaltering bravura and conviction, and she has been superbly recorded. Bryce Morrison

### 'Hommage à Weber'

Godowsky Contrapuntal Paraphrase on 'Invitation to the Dance' Moscheles Grand Duo, 'Hommage à Weber', Op 103 Weber Abu Hassan - Overture. Allemandes, Op 4 - excs. Der Freischütz - Overture. Eight Pieces, Op 60. Piano Concerto No 2, Op 32. Silvana - Overture. Six Pieces, Op 3. Six Pieces, Op 10 Duo d'Accord pfs

Hänssler Classic № ② CD93 324 (139' • DDD)



First, the recording. Duo d'Accord – Lucia Huang and Sebastian Euler – lives up to its

name in terms of precision ensemble and musical accord, though throughout this programme the *primo* part (Euler?) is more forcefully projected than the muted and occasionally somewhat generalised *secondo*. There is nothing occasional, however, about the sharp nasal intake of breath on every up-beat – not good for repeated listening and a distraction from the realistic and well-focused sound recording.

Weber's piano works, sadly, seem to have fallen out of fashion. At his best, he demands to be heard as part of the staple repertoire, though (and as this release illustrates) not all his keyboard music is of equal interest - which is when Weber relinquishes his seat at the high table. Things get off to a sparkling start with the overtures to Abu Hassan and Silvana arranged for piano duet by Richard Kleinmichel (1846-1901). The Duo's own two-piano version of the overture to Der Freischütz opens disc 2. All sparkling stuff, as is the ingenious duet arrangement by Friedrich Jähns (1809-88, cataloguer of Weber's works) of the Piano Concerto No 2, a tour de force from Huang and Euler. Of far less significance are the four sets of brief duets (Opp 3, 4, 10 and 60), 22 titles in all, that punctuate proceedings. Domestic use only. Cherry-picking needed.

Moscheles's Grand Duo using themes from *Euryanthe* and *Oberon*, on the other hand, is a fascinating curiosity in three movements. The homage is completed by Godowsky's labyrinthine treatment of *Invitation to the Dance*, a densely woven contrapuntal exercise in thematic combination that is amusing on one level but on another robs the original of its essential *joie de vivre*. Jeremy Nicholas

### 'Impromptus'

Chopin Three Impromptus. Fantaisie-Impromptu, Op 66 Fauré Impromptus - No 1, Op 25; No 2, Op 31; No 3, Op 34; No 4, Op 91 Schubert Impromptus, D899

**Tomasz Lis** pf Klanglogo (F) KL1511 (70' • DDD)



Impromptus may be the subject of Tomasz Lis's solo CD debut but the pianist's

generally reserved and charmless interpretations suggest otherwise. Next to Maria João Pires's disarming spontaneity and Artur Schnabel's bracing intensity, the first of Schubert's D899 Impromptus proves relatively stiff and oblivious to the music's magical transitions from major to minor mode. Lis judges No 2's dynamics intelligently but the right-hand runs are a shade careful next to Murray Perahia's shimmering poise. Nos 3 and 4's increasingly predictable *ritards* at phrase ends are the musical equivalent of speed bumps on a side street and just as irksome.

Similar expressive conceits in Chopin's *Fantaisie-Impromptu* come off better on account of Lis's more translucent textures.

His lithe and winged A flat Impromptu outer sections bracket a heavily dragging Trio. While the F sharp Impromptu can stand unusually slow readings (Arrau, for example), Lis's enervated phrasing and tensionless central march die on the proverbial vine. But the G flat major, although similarly soft-grained, conveys sufficient poetic impulse.

Lis blends the Fauré First Impromptu's gnarly figurations into Schumannesque blocks while stretching out the second theme to a fault; put on Jean-Philippe Collard's brighter, clearer performance and the fresh air returns. He fares much better with No 2's scampering quasitarantella main theme but returns to earnest, square-toed form for a straitjacketed No 3 that is far removed from Paul Crossley parsing the right-hand melodies so that they move over the barlines. While Collard graces No 4's elusive harmonic sleights of hand with rhetorical insights and sophisticated rubato, Lis's literal, ironclad, bass-heavy traversal sounds comparably Teutonic. The booklet-notes gush about the pianist and production team's painstaking search for a perfect recording venue, and, indeed, the former East Berlin radio station they discovered may well be an acoustic gem. That still doesn't prevent the piano sonority from becoming timbrally strident and diffuse in loud passages.

### Jed Distler

Fauré – selected comparisons:

Collard (9/82<sup>R</sup>) (BRIL) 94035

Crossley (1/88) (CRD) CRD3423

Schubert – selected comparisons:

Perabia (1/84<sup>R</sup>) (SONY) 88691 91256-2

Pires (5/98) (DG) 457 550-2GH2 or 479 2690GB20

### 'Reflections'

**Boulez** Anthèmes **Sciarrino** Sei Capricci **J Widmann** Etudes I-III **Ysaÿe** Solo Violin Sonatas, Op 27 - No 2; No 4

Carolin Widmann vn

Profil © PH14036 (75' • DDD) From Telos TLS116



Carolin Widmann is an outstandingly enterprising artist at a time when many

leading violinists are content to stick with the familiar. For her debut disc, first issued in 2006, she chose to highlight strongly contrasted styles: a pair of Romantic sonatas on the one hand and three contemporary works, including one by her brother Jörg, on the other. Both Ysaÿe sonatas are freshly imagined by Widmann, instances of polished stability in the more turbulent musical seas which surround them. But the overall effect of these chalk-and-cheese juxtapositions is to suggest that the disc works best as a sequence of compositions to be heard separately, not as a continuous programme; and with one of the contemporary pieces, hearing the six constituent movements separately is also the best bet.

Jörg Widmann's three Etudes (another three have been written since) have enough differences in texture and character to make them effective as a single composition. Nevertheless, I have doubts about the way the longest, No 2, progresses from sounds of eerie subtlety (the violinist vocalising as well as playing) to something much more forceful but less memorable. With Sciarrino's Capriccios, the haunting repetitions of No 2 are the high point, the rest relying on a restricted repertoire of brittle and febrile effects: maybe the six were not intended to be heard as a continuous set? Boulez's Anthèmes, for which he later provided an electronic elaboration, also has its repetitive routines. But the verve and economy of the overall design makes this the most satisfying of all the pieces included. The booklet says nothing salient about the compositions and their individual titles can be found only on the back of the jewel box, virtually illegible as printed in turquoise on black.

**Arnold Whittall** 

### 'The Salzburg Recital'

JS Bach Ich ruf zu dir, Herr Jesu Christ, BWV639 Chopin Preludes, Op 28. Mazurkas - Op 63 No 3; Op 68 No 2 Mozart Piano Sonatas - No 2, K280; No 12, K332 Rameau Les Sauvages Scriabin Deux poèmes. Op 69

Grigory Sokolov pf

**(3**)

DG (© 2) 479 4342GH2 (109' • DDD) Recorded live at the Haus für Mozart, Salzburg, July 30, 2008



Good news for pianophiles everywhere that Grigory Sokolov has,

as DG put it, now signed an exclusive contract. This is of course not taking him into the studio or anything as workaday as that. No, he has allowed them to release a live recital from the 2008 Salzburg Festival. But let's not knock that: it's difficult to imagine just how much negotiation that must have taken. Comparisons are irrelevant (except perhaps with himself): this is Sokolov we're talking about. But in

this cult of celebrity, his very aversion to the notion has turned him into one – a bit like Glenn Gould in an earlier era.

Of course, all of this would be beside the point if he didn't produce the goods. It's an overused word, but he is inimitable. His Chopin Preludes, for example, have no time for the notion of a freely Romantic melodic line being kept in check by a Classical accompaniment. Sokolov's reading as a whole is remarkably consistent with that of his live 1990 recital released on Opus 111. In both, he begins unhurriedly, as if the music were gently rousing itself into life. But whereas in less imaginative hands the results could seem mannered or overly drawn out, here it's mesmerising. In the Sixth Prelude, for instance, the upward curling arpeggio has a rare poignancy, while the Tenth glistens but also has an unexpected hesitancy about it. In No 13, the glorious melody of the middle section is given with a freedom that would simply not work in a lesser musician; while in the infamous 'Raindrop', Sokolov replaces the constant dripping with a shifting pulse that has a real urgency, albeit an unconventional one. No 19 is a particular highlight, its delicacy quite heart-stopping. He ends as he began, with a tempo for No 24 that has gravitas (not to be confused with heaviness), the effect granitic, magisterial.

The Mozart is treasurable too, though – of course – you have to take it on its own terms. What he does with the slow movement of K280, for instance, gives it a kind of operatic reach and breadth, though never does it lapse into histrionics. And in the finale he brings out the main theme's stuttering quality superbly, lending the music not just a mercurial quality but a dramatic one too. His delight in the chewy harmonies of the opening movement of K332 is palpable, his phrasing iridescent in its range.

The Salzburg audience (who are generally reasonably silent except for the tumultuous applause) were lucky enough to get six encores. The Scriabin *Poèmes* are more than usually clear descendants of Chopin in Sokolov's hands and the filigree is out of this world. By contrast, Rameau's *Les Sauvages* is unexpectedly playful and whimsical, and we end with a clear-sighted Bach chorale prelude that is all the more moving for its apparent simplicity. As Sokolov says in the booklet: 'I play only what I want to play at the current moment.' Perhaps that's what gives this set such integrity.

#### **Harriet Smith**

Chopin Preludes – selected comparison: Sokolov (10/01) (O111) OPS30-336

## GRAMOPHONE Collector PIANISTS ON DVI

**Jeremy Nicholas** watches four (almost) live concerts by three pianists and a veteran sister-act piano duo



Simple joy: Lang Lang's solo recital at the Royal Albert Hall from November 2013

ore often than not, the facial expressions of a pianist are a substitute for their musical expression. Why, you wonder, aren't the fingers reflecting the face? There are exceptions. The Turkish duo (identical twin sisters) Güher and Süher Pekinel smile and sing their way through a conventional two-piano programme (Mozart's D major Sonata for two pianos, Schubert's F minor Fantasy, Lutosławski's Paganini Variations, etc) conveying their sheer delight in the music. Less conventional is the piano layout: one behind the other so that the secondo player sees only the back of the primo. I'm not sure which sister is which. 'We communicate telepathically,' says Süher or, as the CD cover has it, 'We file on each detail, despite every concert is a surprise [sic]'. It does not altogether discount moments of ensemble imprecision in this live recital, nor in a meaty, rhythmically taut account of Bartók's Concerto for two pianos, percussion and orchestra in which the two pianos face each other (Zubin Mehta conducts). But the spirit of their music-making is everything – and the Pekinels have that in spades.

Lang Lang's much criticised facial expressions are an exact reflection and a kind of running commentary on what he delivers at the keyboard. The first half of his November 2013 recital in the Royal Albert Hall is a sequence of three

Mozart sonatas, superbly poised and elegantly phrased. At the end of K282, with the pianist uninhibitedly enjoying the ride, rather effectively he goes attacca into the maestoso opening of K310. At least, that is the way it is edited, because this 120-minute film is not a single live recital: it is an artful compilation of two made to look like one (the first sold out in 48 hours and another had to be added). In the second half, featuring all four of Chopin's Ballades, beads of perspiration miraculously disappear mid-Ballade; the visible signs of exertion after Op 38 have magically evaporated by the start of Op 47 (these two are the compelling best performances of the four). A generous string of encores follows. Lang Lang's simple joy in playing the piano brilliantly well and his ability to communicate that joy to his adoring public make him a unique figure among his peers.

James Rhodes is another whose performances benefit from the visual element. Here it is not the sight of him playing that adds interest so much as his presentation (Rhodes, for all his hirsute appearance and dressed in the first T-shirt that came to hand that morning, is a model of quiet economy at the keyboard). His 'Love in London' recital was recorded at the Arts Theatre (ie in the West End) and his audience, judging from the raucous whoops and whistles that greet the conclusion of every piece he plays,

is clearly not yer average Southbank lot. The pianist links different aspects of love to each of nine short encore-type works. The rock-star language and sexual allusions that pepper his thoughtful and provocative ideas on classical music will not necessarily appeal to Wigmore Hall regulars. Nor, alas, will some of the performances: Rachmaninov's C sharp minor Prelude has a distorted main theme and, either in performance or patching, an extra quaver chord added in bars 11 and nine before the end; Dudley Moore's Colonel Bogey Variations is played as a serious concert work and without the comic timing; and Ginzburg's transcription of *In the hall of the* mountain king is a party piece Rhodes really should drop. Still and all, he's different, stimulating, frustrated with the predictable, dull and boring, ploughing his own furrow with a fag and a flourish – so hooray.

There could hardly be a greater contrast between Rhodes and Zhu Xiao-Mei. Self-effacing, scholarly and solemn, she has played Bach's Goldberg Variations hundreds of times all over the world. The performance on this DVD, filmed in St Thomas's Church, Leipzig, lacks the expressive range of Perahia or Gould. Hers is an intense, devotional journey in a slightly reverberant acoustic - I much preferred the sound and extracts of Xiao-Mei rehearsing the work in her snowbound studio in the Hautes-Alpes. This we see in the second half of the DVD, a film gnomically entitled 'The Return is the Movement of Tao', in which the pianist talks us through the Goldbergs in a softly spoken French voice-over (English subtitles). Darkness, stillness, running water and the silence of the snow-clad mountains are key elements of Michel Mollard's study. Joy and laughter, so much part of the Goldbergs, are absent from the film - and Xiao-Mei's facial expressions. 6

### THE RECORDINGS



Various Cpsrs In Concert Güher & Süher Pekinel

ArtHaus Musik 🕑 ᆇ 102 191 Various Cpsrs At the Royal Albert Hall



Lang Lang Sony Classical 🖲 🙅 88843 08254-9

Various Cpsrs Love in London James Rhodes



Instrumental (F) SIGDVD012

JS Bach Goldberg Variations Zhu Xao-Mei Accentus 🖲 🙅 ACC20313

### 'Transfiguratio'

Albéniz Mallorca, Op 202 Granados Danza espanola No 4, 'Villanesca' Másson Haustljóð: Poème d'automne Mertz Fantaisie hongroise Mudarra Fantasía que contrahaze la harpa en la manera de Ludovico. Gallarda. Pavana de Alexandre Pujol Concion amatoria. Tonadilla Weiss Sonata No 34 - Allemande; Gigue. Suite No 7 - Courante. Suite No 19 - Bourrée. Tombeau sur la mort de M Cajetan Baron d'Hartig Kristinn Árnason atr

12 Tónar (F) 12TK006 (55' • DDD)



On the surface, prizewinning Icelandic guitarist Kristinn Árnason's latest

recording contains few surprises: a classic recital comprising chronologically ordered pieces from the Renaissance through to today, almost all of which are transcriptions, and a way of playing them which is more idiomatic to the modern classical guitar than to any of the source instruments such as the vihuela or the lute.

But there's more going on here, and the title 'Transfiguratio', as well as the clever use of graphics, provides some clues. Each one of the seven symbols which adorn the cover is keyed to a particular composer: a harp symbol for the Renaissance vihuelist Alonso Mudarra because his Fantasia was written to imitate the playing of Ferdinand III's harpist; a 10-string symbol for Romantic composer Johann Kaspar Mertz because he used a 10-string guitar; and so on.

Then there's the fact that Albéniz and Granados's piano music was in part inspired by, and has long been arranged for, the classical guitar; or that Emilio Pujol was an inveterate arranger; or that JS Bach actually arranged some of his lutenist friend Weiss's music for harpsichord and violin. Finally, there is the transfiguration of sorts in Áskell Másson's haunting *Haustljóð: Poème d'automne*, dedicated to the memory of one of his relatives, the Icelandic guitarist Einar Kr Einarsson.

Árnason, whose teachers include Gordon Crosskey, José Tomas and Nicolas Goluses, is a musician of great intelligence; and if his generally linear approach is less suited to Weiss than to Másson, his imagination is such that the former feels as newly minted as the latter.

William Yeoman

### 'The Usher Hall Organ, Vol 2'

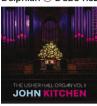
JS Bach Passacaglia and Fugue, BWV582

Guilmant Fantaisie, Op 17 - Marche funèbre et chant séraphique C Hughes Dance Variations

on 'Rudolph the red-nosed reindeer' **MacCunn** The Land of the Mountain and the Flood (arr Cull) **McDowall** Church bells beyond the stars **Maxim** Toccata nuptiale **Myers** Johnny on the Spot **B Rose** Chimes **SS Wesley** Holsworthy Church Bells **Widor** Symphony No 5, Op 42 - three movements

John Kitchen org

Delphian (F) DCD34132 (78' • DDD)



Ten years on from his first recording for Delphian of the (then) newly restored

Norman and Beard in the Usher Hall, Edinburgh's City Organist has released another appetisingly well-balanced mixture of short(ish) original works – including two premiere recordings, effective transcriptions, lighter fare, as well as three solid helpings from the mainstream repertoire. On paper some of the juxtapositions look a little bizarre: Sherman Myer's breezy Johnny on the Spot, for example, shouldn't really be rubbing shoulders with three hefty chunks of Widor's Fifth Symphony, but it all works wonderfully well.

It helps that Kitchen has the innate musical ability to switch between these diverse idioms with great ease and to project the music to the back of the stalls, which, in fact, were removed from the Hall's floor for this recording, thereby giving this gorgeous 63-stop leviathan (which is celebrating its centenary) an even greater bloom and tonal magnificence.

Three pieces have campanological associations. Cecilia McDowall's attractive opener, Church bells beyond the stars, makes suitably sparkling play with the higher reaches of the keyboards and proves a worthy companion to SS Wesley's evergreen Holsworthy Church Bells (which features the organ's two-octave Carillon) and Bernard Rose's miniature (and palindromic) Chimes. The heft of the diapasons and the incision of the reed chorus come to the fore in the Guilmant and Jeremy Cull's superb transcription of the MacCunn overture. By contrast, Clifton Hughes's Rudolph variations are lit by some tasteful theatre-organ hues and Kitchen concludes with a richly registered account of the Bach Passacaglia and Fugue which shows just how versatile both player and his instrument are.

Malcolm Riley

### 'Visions fugitives'

**Chopin** Piano Sonata No 3, Op 58 **Medtner** Fairy Tale, Op 26 No 3

**Prokofiev** Visions fugitives, Op 22 **Anna Gourari** *pf* ECM New Series **(E)** 481 1157 (61' • DDD)



In Anna Gourari's hands, the quirky, caustic, cameo-like and seemingly

spontaneous qualities of Prokofiev's Visions fugitives become monumental, aloof and calculated. She slows down No 1's Lentamente, magnifying its melody beyond Prokofiev's pianissimo specification, flattens out No 2's marked changes of character that Steven Osborne vividly and faithfully conveys, and slightly overpedals No 3's opening section. Her heavy-gaited articulation of No 4 doesn't quite mirror Prokofiev's Animato directive. In No 5, Osborne consistently differentiates the right-hand staccatos and left-hand accented notes over the long pedal, but not Gourari, although she perfectly nails the animated elegance of No 6. Her slapdash rushing through No 9's repeated notes and cavalier dynamics totally miss the music's tranquil point, yet she contrasts No 15's motoric rhythms well. If Osborne makes more of No 17's legatissimo and espressivo distinctions, Gourari's relatively deadpan conception convinces on its own terms.

Observing the long exposition repeat, Gourari revels in the maestoso mood and grand transitional gestures in the first movement of Chopin's Third Sonata, yet she also knows when to move things along, such as in the development section's knotty contrapuntal sequences. Taken at less than a true Molto vivace, the Scherzo's outer sections don't scintillate, while Gourari heaves and sighs over the Trio for no reason other than that she can. Her Largo features outsize dynamics and firmly anchored left-hand rhythms that prevent her slow tempo from falling apart, although she pushes ahead in the the central majorkey triplet episode. The pianist's fussy overphrasings and false accents poke and jab at the Presto non tanto finale without really getting it to move.

Lastly, Gourari's ruminative and fastidiously voiced Medtner F minor Fairy Tale falls short of Hamish Milne's floating cantabile and sense of narrative. ECM's production values uphold the label's storied reputation, if not necessarily this pianist's overall artistry.

#### Jed Distler

Prokofiev – selected comparison: Osborne (3/13) (HYPE) CDA67896 Medtner – selected comparison: Milne (HYPE) CDA67491/2

## GRAMOPHONE Collector RUSSIAN PIANO REISSUES

**Bryce Morrison** listens to a selection of pianists in Russian repertoire whose recordings are now making welcome reappearances



Luxury and restraint: Nicholas Angelich offers Rachmaninov 'with a cooling agent' on Harmonia Mundi

oes a pianist's nationality guarantee empathy with the music of his own land? Schnabel and Beethoven, Rubinstein and Chopin, Alicia de Larrocha and Albéniz may be synonymous; but what of Gieseking (a German-Swiss) or Richter (Russian) in Debussy? 'The music is in his/her blood' easily becomes the stuff of cliché. Yet listening to Lazar Berman's Rachmaninov it is hard to imagine playing more indelibly Russian. For Gilels he was 'the phenomenon of the music world', while Solomon made a more qualified estimate. My late colleague Joan Chissell wondered whether Berman's daunting mastery was complemented by the opening of 'magic casements, and all that kind of thing', and it is true that in his native Russia Berman was viewed as a second-class, loud and fast pianist hardly worthy for export.

Early recordings of, say, the Prokofiev Toccata do indeed make a blast-off from Cape Canaveral seem tame by comparison. But later Berman's volatility could be complemented by the finest lyricism. And in his second recording of Rachmaninov's six Moments musicaux, his playing is as refined as it is awe-inspiring. The more restrained Nos 3 and 5 are marvels of poise counterbalancing a performance of No 6 of such visceral strength that it makes you recall Edgar Allan Poe's tintinnabulation that so musically wells / the bells, bells, bells, bells'. The final pages, too, of the Corelli Variations are given with an intensity suggesting pain rather than emotion recollected in tranquillity, and in a selection of Preludes there is ample contrast between the tortured climbing of No 1 in F sharp minor and the pulverising virtuosity of No 2 in B flat.

In Prokofiev Berman is less convincing, as if confined rather than liberated by the Second Sonata's early

iconoclasm. Tempi are on the cautious side, though there are spurts of the legendary trenchancy. He is less mesmeric than Richter (in his first London recital captured on BBC Legends), who erases all sense of longueurs in the Eighth Sonata's opening Andante dolce and who makes your hair stand on end in the sinister inquieto interjections. Berman can be heavy-footed, too, in the balletic wonders of Romeo and Juliet, where he is less rhythmically keen than, say, Gavrilov (his early EMI disc) but refinds his best form in a group of Shostakovich Preludes, responding more acutely to their quirky alternations of the recondite and exuberant.

Staying with Russia, Samuil Feinberg's vast repertoire extended in every direction, and in the Scriabin Mazurkas, where a phantom Chopin emerges with a Russian twist, he is endearingly old-fashioned and improvisatory. Very much for those who respond to Scriabin's later manner (opalescent magic for some, wilful obscurantism for others), they also include

a startling prophecy of Hindemith's Suite 1922 and, more amusingly, 'Love is the sweetest thing' (Nos 10 and 2 respectively).

Scriabin also comes from Piers Lane, who is enviably fluent in the complete Etudes even when his facility does duty for a deeper engagement. The central section of Op 8 No 4 is given less than its lyrical due; and if the double notes of No 11 are dispatched with ease, there is too little of, say, Horowitz's brio (admittedly a cruel comparison). Op 63 shows a quantum leap into darker regions of the heart and mind, a departure that made Stravinsky ask 'Scriabin, where does he come from and who are his followers?' Again, Lane's performances are exemplary as far as they go, though there are times when you recall Abram Chasins's exclamation to Jorge Bolet during the early part of his career: 'You play fast, but you don't sound fast!'

Much the same could be said of Nicholas Angelich's recording of Rachmaninov's complete Etudes-tableaux. Glorious in Brahms, he takes a surprisingly sobre-suited view of Rachmaninov; and although his mastery is evident throughout, he plays down virtuoso challenges in the interests of restraint. He is memorable in the Op 22 'extra' Etude in C major, where gloom and despondency blossom into one of the composer's most luxuriant and heartfelt confidences, and there is no doubting his authority in the Siberian whirlwind of No 5 in E flat minor. But, more generally, this is Rachmaninov with a cooling agent and the D major march rhythms of No 9 are hardly exultant in the Russian manner born.

No, in Rachmaninov Berman is your man, a true Titan with a heart of gold. Few more powerful or eloquent performances exist on record, with the possible exception of the composer, and even then... **G** 

### HE RECORDINGS



Rachmaninov Piano Works Lazar Berman

DG Eloquence ® 480 7078

Prokofiev. Shostakovich Piano Works Lazar Berman DG Eloquence ® 480 7075



Scriabin Mazurkas, Opp 3 & 25 Samuil Feinberg Melodiva (F) MELCD100 2192

Scriabin Complete Etudes

Piers Lane Hyperion Helios ® CDH55242



Rachmaninov Etudes-tableaux

Nicholas Angelich Harmonia Mundi ® HMA195 1547

# Einojuhani Rautavaara

Guy Rickards surveys the career and music of the Grand Old Man of Finnish Music

ome composers – Max Bruch is a fine example – achieve their mature style early and rest content to create without developing along different lines. Others – Blomdahl and Stravinsky spring to mind – changed radically throughout their careers ('musical barometers', to re-use Robert Layton's famous phrase). The music of Einojuhani Rautavaara (*b*1928), the most famous and popular of Finnish composers, lies somewhere between these two extremes, having undergone several twists and turns over the years yet retaining a pervasive personal voice that makes almost every work recognisably his.

He first came to wider attention in the mid-1950s, when *A Requiem in Our Time* (1953) – a purely instrumental work for brass – won the Thor Johnson Composition Contest in Cincinnati. Its success came to the attention of Sibelius and when, in 1955, in honour of his 90th birthday, he was offered the chance to nominate a young Finnish composer to attend the Juilliard School in New York, it was Rautavaara he chose. (The two composers came to know each other as the younger man would occasionally drive visiting celebrities to Sibelius's home, Ainola – in his mother's car – to meet Finland's home-based cultural ambassador.) The two years

# 'Angel of Light marked a new breakthrough, his music no longer the preserve of the critics and cognoscenti'

spent in New York, including some time with Copland and Sessions at Tanglewood and followed by spells of study in Ascona with Wladimir Vogel and in Cologne with Rudolf Petzold, introduced Rautavaara to the then most recent trends in contemporary composition including, of course, serialism. The impact of the latter methodology, as learnt from Sessions, Vogel and Petzold, can be heard by comparing the music of the serial Third Symphony (1961) and *Arabescata* (1962, retitled No 4 in the late 1980s) with their two stylistically less advanced predecessors, the much-rewritten First (1956, revised in 1988 and again in 2003, almost as much and as radically as Henze's First of a decade before) and the transitional Second (1957, rev 1984), in which one can begin to hear the refining of the composer's personal voice.

In an output running to over 150 compositions, with dozens of orchestral pieces, Rautavaara's eight symphonies are one of his important contributions to 20th-century music (the most recent – the Eighth, *The Journey* – dates from 1999; there are no plans now, it seems, for a Ninth). Their history is as convoluted and their styles as challenging as those of his great older compatriot and serve as a barometer for the paths he has taken as a creative artist. The First emulates Sibelius's Fifth by



Einojuhani Rautavaara, 86 years old, and still composing prolifically

existing in three versions, while the original Fourth (1964-70) never found a satisfactory final form (akin to Sibelius's Eighth and Penderecki's still-withheld Sixth). The Third, with its astonishing emulation of Bruckner, also ranks as one of the very first truly serial works in Finnish music, alongside Arabescata. By the time the latter was selected to join Rautavaara's symphonic canon, and after a 15-year gap from symphonic composition, the great single span of No 5 (1985) had been completed. It was followed in relatively rapid succession by No 6 (Vincentiana, 1992, derived from his Van Gogh opera, Vincent, completed five years earlier) and the Seventh, Angel of Light (1994), which unified the symphonies with another prominent strand in his output from the early 1970s, the Angels series which had included several concertos (for organ, Annunciations, 1976-77, and double bass, Angel of Dusk, 1980). Angel of Light marked a new breakthrough for Rautavaara to a newer, wider audience, his music no longer the preserve of the critics and cognoscenti. However, Rautavaara had not planned to write such a work at the time, only composing it to a commission from the Bloomington Symphony Orchestra in Indiana. Its success followed in the wake of Górecki's Third as a work of compelling substance expressed in an audiencefriendly, euphonious style, recognisably modern without pastiche. Whereas Górecki's score stands apart from his output, the Seventh Symphony was audibly central to Rautavaara's development at that time, and a continuation of the style crystallised so compellingly – in the symphonies, at least – in the Fifth and continued further in the Eighth.

Rautavaara's music embraces almost every form and genre in classical music, however. His 14 concertos include three for piano, two for cello – the Second, coupled with the Percussion Concerto *Incantations* (2008), won the *Gramophone* Contemporary Music Award in 2012 – and others for flute, violin, harp, clarinet and, in 1971, *Daughter of the Sea* for soprano, choir and orchestra. His other orchestral pieces range from the highly advanced *Prevariata* 

**74 GRAMOPHONE** FEBRUARY 2015 gramophone.co.uk



and Modificata (both 1957), to the transitional Angels and Visitations (1978), to a series in his latest mystically inclined manner: Isle of Bliss (1995), Autumn Gardens (1999), Book of Visions (2003-05), Manhattan Trilogy (2004), Before the Icons (2005, reworking a piano suite of 1955) and A Tapestry of Life (2007). He has written a marvellous series of string orchestral works, central to which are the five Cantos (1960-2011), his vivacious suite The Fiddlers (1952 - also for piano - and revised two decades later) and An Epitaph for Béla Bartók (1955/86). His chamber and instrumental output is diverse, including four string quartets (1952-75), sonatas for piano (1969 and 1970), cello (1972-23, 1991),

### RAUTAVAARA FACTS

Born Helsinki, October 9, 1928 Education Sibelius Academy, Helsinki (1948-53), pupil of Aarre Merikanto; Juilliard School, New York, pupil of Vincent Persichetti (1955-56); Tanglewood Summer School, studied with Roger Sessions and Aaron Copland; Ascona, pupil of Wladimir Vogel (1957); Cologne, pupil of Rudolf Petzold (1957)

Career Freelance composer; Thor Johnson Prize (1954, for *A Requiem in Our Time*); teacher and professor, Sibelius Academy (various times between 1957 and 1990); Rector, Käpylä Music Institute, Helsinki (1965-66)

### **Breakthrough works**

A Requiem in Our Time (1953); Symphony No 7, Angel of Light (1994)

#### **Definitive work**

Symphony No 5 (1985)

On Rautavaara 'Rautavaara has often compared composing to gardening. Both are about the observing and monitoring of organic growth, not so much about constructing or assembling from preexisting parts and elements.' (Jaakko Mäntyjärvi)

### Rautavaara on Rautavaara

'I'm not the mother of my works, but kind of a midwife.' 'Don't ever try to force your music, because music is very wise and it has its own will. It knows where to go. You have to listen to it, to listen to your material which you have chosen. Start with that and then the material will dictate where it wants to go. It's much wiser than you are. Don't push yourself, but try to find out what the music wants to become.'

bassoon (1970), flute and guitar (1975) and, most recently, Summer Thoughts for violin and piano (2008; written for Midori) and the Second String Quintet Variations for Five (2013; the first dates from 1997). His nine operas range from the controversial early The Mine (1957-60, rev 1962) and the chamber operas The House of the Sun (1989-90) and The Gift of the Magi (1993-94), to complex operatic treatments of Van Gogh in Vincent – with its prominent accompanying role for DX7 synthesiser – and Rasputin (2001-03), to nationalist subjects: The Myth of Sampo (1974/82), Thomas (1982-85) and

Aleksis Kivi (1995-96). His choral output – mixed, male or female – is enormous and runs throughout his career, from his vivid setting of two of TS Eliot's Preludes when a student in New York, to the vivid (and oft-performed) Suite de Lorca (1973), noble motets such as Katedralen (1982) and Die erste Elegie (1993, setting Rilke), to larger cantatas such as True and False Unicorn (1971, reworked in 2000) and the wonderful hour-long Vigilia (1971-72, rev 1996), a late-20th-century setting of the Russian Orthodox all-night vigil worthy of comparison with Rachmaninov's great setting.

Trying to select a 'definitive work' for a composer of such breadth of vision, who has created so much music of lasting quality, might seem a self-defeating task. Where to begin? With one of the operas, perhaps, or the choral suites *Book* of Life (1972) or Canción de nuestro tiempo (1993)? One of his most popular – and oft-recorded – works is Cantus arcticus (1971-72), his delightful 'concerto for birds and orchestra' where pre-recorded birdsong from the Finnish landscape interweaves with the orchestra. In the end, I selected the Fifth Symphony, one of his grandest utterances. The long opening section is like a depiction of some vast marine leviathan as it breathes and rises and moves through an elemental ocean, and this scale and inexorable momentum are sustained throughout its half-hour duration. The closing section is just as remarkable, with a real sense of conclusion. It is an astounding conception from a truly original modern master. And he is still busy, recent works including a new piano piece, Mirroring, the song-cycle Rubaiyat for Gerald Finley and the cantata Balada to a text by Lorca, to be premiered in May 2015 in Madrid. He is currently writing a fantasia for violin and orchestra for Anne Akiko Meyers. 6

### RECOMMENDED RECORDINGS

Three discs that show the range of Rautavaara's output



### Cantus arcticus. Symphonies Nos 4 and 5

**Leipzig Radio Symphony Orchestra / Max Pommer** Ondine © ODE747-2

A perfect sampler of Rautavaara's music pre-Angel of Light. Cantus arcticus remains

one of Rautavaara's most successful and approachable works, while the Fifth Symphony is one of his finest utterances. Max Pommer directs his Leipzig players in recordings the composer acclaimed as 'perfect'.



#### Rasputin

Matti Salminen bass Lilli Paasikivi sop Jorma Hynninen bar Finnish National Opera Chorus & Orchestra / Mikko Franck Ondine (F) 2004002 (3/06)

The largest and grandest of Rautavaara's operas, performed here with the finest imaginable cast.

Salminen's portrayal of the mad monk is multi-layered and the performances by Paasikivi and Hynninen as the Tsarina and the Tsar are perfectly judged.

Suite de Lorca. Canción de nuestro tiempo. Die erste Elegie. Magnificat, etc

Schola Cantorum of Oxford / James Burton Hyperion (F) CDA67787 (2/10)

This collection provides a fine overview of Rautavaara's choral output, beautifully sung by the Schola

Cantorum of Oxford and presented in glorious sound by Hyperion. There are several choral programmes devoted to Rautavaara, many rivalling this but none surpassing it.

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# Vocal



Pwyll ap Siôn on a new work from a prominent Russian composer:

Within this rigid, almost ritualistic process, Raskatov shapes a work of smooth transitions and sharp juxtapositions' > REVIEW ON PAGE 80



## Alexandra Coghlan listens to a recreation of Rameau's funeral:

'Rameau's invention announces itself every time it appears, seizing the ear with character' > REVIEW ON PAGE 84

### Clérambault · F Couperin

Clérambault Miserere a 3
F Couperin Trois Leçons de Ténèbre
Hasnaa Bennani, Claire Lefilliâtre sops
Isabelle Druet mez Le Poème Harmonique /
Vincent Dumestre

Alpha (F) ALPHA957 (65' • DDD)



At their sublime best, Le Poème Harmonique's recordings are so

singular that comparisons with other performances of the same repertoire aren't relevant, so much has this early music group evolved into something that follows its own expressive rules that may be solidly based in current musicology precepts but never feels restricted by them. Les Arts Florissants have more exterior sheen; Les Demoiselles de Saint-Cyr, in the Clérambault Miserere, an attractive softfocus quality in a 1993 Virgin recording that predates the one-voice-to-a-part performance practice that has swept through the early music world. Le Poème Harmonique offer their trademark blend in which each of the three voices here sound like extensions of each other, yielding clarity that's particularly revealing in the dissonant tension in Clérambault's more intense tone-painting while also projecting a gravity that past generations generated with larger vocal contingents.

The piece can lose credibility in moments of seemingly forced levity that now come off like a bald attempt to ingratiate. But the distinctive acoustic of the Chapelle Royale at Versailles (where this was recorded) is an atmospheric factor reminding listeners not to impose modern notions of solemnity upon this 18th-century music. In any case, the intense humanity of the singing becomes a unifying factor in the piece.

Though I've rarely heard a recording of Couperin's *Leçons de Ténèbres* that I didn't want to hear again – so much does it inspire the best efforts of its performers – this one

stands with the best (including Emma Kirkby's, made years apart, first on L'Oiseau-Lyre and then on BIS), the strengths being the purity and accuracy of the vocal lines and a sense of how forward-looking the music must have sounded in its own time. The body of each Lecon establishes a certain harmonic playing field familiar to anyone who knows the French Baroque, though this recording underscores the composer's rhapsodic departure from all of that when announcing each verse with the Hebrew letters, with music that can waft towards the Holy Land with hints of Middle Eastern influence.

#### **David Patrick Stearns**

Clérambault – selected comparison:

Demoiselles de Saint-Cyr, Mandrin
(2/95<sup>®</sup>) (VIRG) 561529-2

Couperin – selected comparisons:

Kirkby, Hogwood (6/78<sup>®</sup>, 12/91) (LOIL) 478 6753DB50

Kirkby, Medlam (5/08) (BIS) BIS-CD1575

### **H** Balfour Gardiner

The Stranger's (or Hangman's) Song.
When I was one-and-twenty. The Wanderer's
Evensong. Roadways. The Golden Vanity.
Music, when soft voices die. The Recruit. The
Banks of Calm Bendemeer. Ah, sweet those
eyes. How sweet I roam'd from field to field.
Dirge, 'Rough wind that moanest loud'. Lightly
we met in the morn. D'un Vanneur du Blé aux
Vents. Three Shakespeare Settings. On
Chelsea Embankment. Cavalier. Rybbesdale.
The Quiet Garden. Three Piano Pieces Prelude, 'De profundis'; A Sailors' Piece;
Shepherd Fennel's Dance

Martin Oxenham bar Jonathan Beatty pf Regent © REGCD450 (63' • DDD)



Much of Balfour Gardiner's music has remained under a bushel for years.

Celebrated in church for his bracing anthem, *Evening Hymn*, and at one time in the concert hall for his orchestral favourite, the somewhat Graingeresque

Shepherd Fennel's Dance, he has suffered much neglect on CD, save for some piano works (with Peter Jacobs on the Continuum label) and the recently recorded and highly attractive Overture to a Comedy (Chandos). This recording of the complete songs (along with three piano miniatures) is therefore a most welcome addition to the discography in that it provides a picture of the highly self-critical Gardiner from his student days in the 1890s at Charterhouse and Frankfurt until the early 1920s, when he resolved to renounce composition altogether.

The songs are, for the most part, a mixed bag. The early unpublished pieces have a euphonious charm, while the songs from the turn of the century echo the suave craftsmanship of Quilter, especially those using familiar Shakespeare texts ('Fear no more the heat o' the sun' and 'Full fathom five'). There are settings of Housman ('When I was one-and-twenty' and 'The Recruit'), Masefield ('Roadways') and Goethe ('The Wanderer's Evensong') which date from the 1900s; but the most personal songs tend to be those of a more introspective nature, such as 'Winter', 'Chelsea Embankment' and 'The Quiet Garden'. Oxenham's interpretations are sympathetic and his diction clear, though just occasionally there is some unsteady intonation. Beatty's accompaniments are sensitive, as is his role as soloist in De profundis and the piano version of Shepherd Fennel's Dance.

Jeremy Dibble

### Lassus

'Biographie musicale, Vol 4'
Al gran Guglielmo nostro. Missa super Dixit
Joseph. Dixit Joseph. Vidimus stellam ejus. Tutto
lo di mi dici. Helas j'ay sans mercy. De l'eterne
tue sante. Tragico tecti. Cum essem parvulus.
Canzon, la doglia. Arse la fiamma. O fugace
dolcezza. Urtheil mich Herr. Hilff lieber Herr. Wir
haben Herr. Memento peccati tui. Von Got wil
ich nit lassen. Musica Dei donum optimi
Odhecaton / Paolo Da Col dir

Musique en Wallonie (F) MEW1474 (74' • DDD)

78 GRAMOPHONE FEBRUARY 2015 gramophone.co.uk



This is the fourth instalment in a musical biography of the true Renaissance man

among late-Renaissance composers. As with preceding volumes, the anthology covers all the genres in which he worked: Mass, motet, madrigal, German song and of course French chanson. The programme works very well, not least because the choice of works is astute, nearly consistently out of the top drawer. In keeping with the set's chronological approach, they are drawn from the final 15 years of Lassus's life. The Missa super Dixit Foseph (never recorded previously as far as I'm aware) is a splendid work, complex and expansive, and the moving Musica Dei donum, which concludes the disc, is a fitting testament. The Italian and German works do not strike me quite so forcibly but the vignette Helas j'ay sans mercy illustrates Lassus's ability to choose and clothe texts in his mother tongue with infinite discernment and subtlety. A complete recording of his chansons (or at least a substantial survey) is long overdue.

Odhecaton are surer-footed here than in the Gesualdo motet collection anthology I reviewed in November. Their interpretations are confident though not always pitch-perfect, but at their best these are valuable additions to the discography, particularly those of the pieces I've named. (There is, however, an audible misreading just before the 6'00" mark in the Credo of the Mass.) Lassus enthusiasts will find the booklet irresistible, with illustrations that convey the gloomy texture of the composer's last years. Particularly poignant is the document of 1594 that lists him among the personnel that the ducal administration had decided to sack for lack of money: the ink was scarcely dry before it was crossed out with the laconic annotation, 'dead'. Fabrice Fitch

### Melani

Marian Vespers

Soloists of the Rheinische Kantorei; Das Kleine Konzert / Hermann Max CPO (E) CPO777 936-2 (66' • DDD) Recorded live at the Rheingau Festival,



The Melani clan of Pistoia spawned numerous successful musicians during the 17th century. Alessandro Melani (1639-1703) was the youngest of seven brothers; his eldest brother Jacopo was a successful opera composer in Venice, Rome and Florence, and another brother, Atto, was a castrato with a talent for diplomatic service on behalf of Louis XIV and Pope Clement IX. Connections with the papacy helped Alessandro to be appointed maestro di cappella at S Maria Maggiore and then at S Luigi, the French national church in Rome. Hermann Max collects together various appropriate pieces for a hypothetical Marian Vespers; not every necessary text is covered by Melani, so Max interpolates two pieces by Giuseppe Ottavio Pitoni (1657-1743), whose long Roman career intersected with Corelli and both Scarlattis; the Palestrina-influenced simplicity of Pitoni's hymn Ave maris stella provides an illuminating contrast with the intricate grandeur and theatricality of Melani's Magnificat.

Ten experienced specialist singers are skilled at shaping choral counterpoint, declaiming homophonic chords, and florid solo singing, although CPO's booklet does not specify exactly which of them performs the challenging virtuoso parts in some pieces. The soprano soloists are mildly beleaguered by uneven intonation in the motets 'Vox turturis audita est' and 'Caeli gaudete' (both taken from Melani's 1673 collection Delectus sacrorum concentuum), whereas two interleaving sopranos sing rapturously in the 'concerto' 'Salve, mater et regina' taken from Concerti spirituali (1682). 'Laudate pueri' features a single soprano soloist with four-part chorus but sometimes the disposition and manipulation of forces is more intricate, such as multiple solo voices working both within and in juxtaposition to superb eight-part double-choir sections in 'Nisi Dominus'. Melani's music merits further investigations of this calibre. David Vickers

### Monteverdi

Vespro della Beata Vergine Amarcord; Lautten Compagney / Wolfgang Katschner

Carus (F) CARUS83 394 (80' • DDD)



To my knowledge this is only the second time a Monteverdi *Vespers* has fitted on to one

CD, which may not be all that important a thing in the age of the download but does at least tell us something about the interpretation. Yet although at 80 minutes this is undoubtedly a swift *Vespers* (if not as

speedy as the 75-minute version from Christina Pluhar and L'Arpeggiata – Virgin, 5/11), the interesting thing is that it does not often hit the ear as so. The only movements noticeably faster than usual are the 'Dixit Dominus' and the 'Sonata sopra Sancta Maria', but neither actually feels rushed. Wolfgang Katschner, it seems, has saved time less by driving the music hard than by making sure it never dawdles.

The small-scale forces used here -10 solo voices and the minimum number of instruments (though some play discreetly in places where not specifically requested) probably help it to be so light on its feet, and allow for clarity of texture and beauty of line, too, wonderfully captured in the controlled resonance of a hardish church acoustic. This is an intimate Vespers, not given to huge drama or massive presence, and one in which the most striking gestures - the gentle, simple Amen at the end of a cheerfully forward-moving 'Dixit Dominus', a hushed 'qui habitare' section in 'Laudate pueri' and a brisk Amen at the end of the Magnificat - take it in the direction of inner calm.

Katschner opts for the higher-key version of the 'Lauda Jerusalem' and *Magnificat*, purely as a matter of personal taste it seems, though to my mind it gives the cornetts and violins an unpleasantly toy-like sound, and given that the pitch is already A=465 throws quite a throaty challenge to the sopranos. The soloists, not individually identified but presumably the core members of Amarcord, are competent without being particularly characterful. 'Duo Seraphim', so meltingly exotic sometimes, is here rather matter-of-fact.

An honest, well-thought and well-executed *Vespers* with interesting things of its own to say, if not really a first recommendation. **Lindsay Kemp** 

### Petrassi

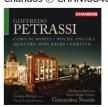
Partita. Quattro Inni sacri<sup>a</sup>.

Noche oscura<sup>b</sup>. Coro di morti<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Giorgio Berrugi ten <sup>a</sup>Vasily Ladyuk bar

Orchestra and <sup>b</sup>Chorus of the Teatro Regio,
Turin / Gianandrea Noseda

Chandos ® CHAN10840 (69' • DDD • T/t)



Following the 2013 release of Petrassi's *Magnificat* and *Salmo IX*° (3/13),

Gianandrea Noseda and the Orchestra e Coro Teatro Regio Torino turn their attention to more of Petrassi's sacred music and also to the purely orchestral *Partita* of 1932, a tasty neo-classical sandwich with an intensely flavoured chaconne wrapped in two outer movements of rhythmic, textural and instrumental brilliance. This is fairly early Petrassi but it already reveals the strength of ideas and the command of structure that were to be prominent features of his later music. Noseda and the orchestra convey both the music's élan and the manner in which Petrassi seems to take such pleasure in his skills, not in any studied way but with an exuberant confidence that manages to combine rigour with spontaneity.

With the solemnity and fervour of the Quattro Inni sacri Petrassi enters a different world. These Latin hymns were originally written for voice and organ but acquired their orchestral clothing in 1950, enhancing the atmospheric and often radiant colour spectrum that complements the impassioned vocal lines, here articulated dramatically by the tenor Giorgio Berrugi in Nos 1 and 2 and by the baritone Vasily Ladyuk in Nos 3 and 4. Noche oscura (1950-51) and Coro di morti (1940-41) both feature the Teatro Regio chorus, as assured in the mystical, ethereally chromatic language with which Petrassi voices the poetry of St John of the Cross in the former as it is in the dark colours, apprehension and shrouded imagery of Coro di morti. Geoffrey Norris

### Rameau

Le berger fidèle<sup>a</sup>. Orphée<sup>a</sup>.
Pièces de clavecin en concerts - No 2; No 5

<sup>a</sup>Mathias Vidal ten Amarillis
Naïve 

© V5377 (62' • DDD)



Ensemble Amarillis commemorate Rameau with a balanced offering

alternating two chamber cantatas and two chamber concertos from Pièces de clavecin en concerts (1741). Orphée was composed at least 20 years earlier, when Rameau was organist at Clermont Cathedral before he relocated to Paris: the hero departs with Eurydice on a gloomy path out of Hades but cannot withstand not being allowed to turn around and look at her; he laments losing her forever. Le berger fidèle was performed at the Concert Français in 1728: the shepherd Myrtilus bewails the angry instruction of Diana to sacrifice his lover Amaryllis, but his pleading placates the goddess and he looks forward to a joyful reunion with his beloved.

The cantatas were written for sopranos but Ensemble Amarillis choose to perform with the tenor Mathias Vidal, claiming that his 'timbre at once powerful and mellow... reflects our wish to restore all their liveliness and their vivacity to these miniature dramas'. I'm unconvinced that a soprano cannot do this sufficiently but Vidal is a transparent story-teller who delivers the key dramatic moments in each cantata mellifluously, strongly, plaintively or gleefully as required. Liberal reassignment also occurs in the instrumentation of all four works, with oboe, recorder and violin used interchangeably. Héloïse Gaillard's choice of oboe in 'La Laborde' (Deuxième concert) overpowers Marianne Muller's gentle viola da gamba and Violaine Cochard's articulate concertante harpsichord, although the balance is sweeter in 'La Boucon'. I preferred the subtler textural balance and consistent aesthetic achieved when the top part is played exclusively by violinist Alice Piérot throughout the Cinquième concert, including sublime tributes to members of the viol-playing Forqueray and Marais dynasties. David Vickers

### Raskatov

Monk's Music: Seven Words by Starets Silouan Gordon Jones bass Carducci Quartet
Louth Contemporary Music Society © LCMS1302 (54' • DDD • T)



Those who attended English National Opera's production of Alexander

Raskatov's *A Dog's Heart* in 2010 and came out both repulsed and attracted by its absurdist satire will be in for a very different kind of surprise with *Monk's Music*. Based on texts by Starets Silouan (or St Silouan the Athonite, as he became known posthumously), *Monk's Music* is no less dramatic than the Russian composer's opera, in fact, but in a far more personal and thoughtful way.

Premiered in Dundalk, Ireland, in 2013, the basic structure of Monk's Music is straightforward. A solo bass intones a short text taken from St Silouan followed by an instrumental section for string quartet. The pattern is repeated seven times in total (hence the reference in the title to Silouan's 'seven words'). Within this rigid, almost ritualistic process, Raskatov shapes a work of smooth transitions and sharp juxtapositions: darkly dissonant during the first movement's opening exchanges, gently uplifting in the second, aggressive and assertive during the third, mellifluous in the fourth, passionate during the fifth, agitated during the sixth and exuding

moments of transcendent beauty in the seventh. Each movement shifts, sometimes uneasily, between these modes in a state of flux, all of which is designed to portray a spiritual journey that is often full of turmoil, conflict and self-doubt. Silouan's words act as a springboard for Raskatov's imagination and he has responded with an intensely expressive, engaging and moving work.

Bass soloist Gordon Jones and the Carducci Quartet are equally impressive on this recording, the former drawing on previous experiences of singing Raskatov's work with The Hilliard Ensemble to give shape and resonance to the chant-like iterations, and the latter for a performance of supreme clarity, focus and precision.

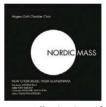
Pwyll ap Sion

### S-D Sandström

Nordic Mass

Toke Møldrup *vc* 

Mogens Dahl Chamber Choir / Mogens Dahl Exlibris © EXLCD30164 (82' • DDD)



For the musically curious with time on their hands, as well as a penchant for superb

a cappella singing, this monumental celebration of Nordic 'natural phenomena' should prove an intriguing and highly satisfying acquisition.

The Nordic Mass was commissioned by the Bergen International Festival. Its secular text is drawn from various poetry collections by the Nobel Laureate Tomas Tranströmer (b1931), published between 1954 and 1996, and set to music by his fellow Swede, Sven-David Sandström (b1942), a prolific choral composer. Although its 25 sections follow the structure of the Mass, the libretto reflects the life experiences of modern mankind. Thus 'The Journey' (tr 8) depicts a vocal representation of a journey on an underground railway and 'Espresso' (tr 11) has a delicious, Ravel-like bouncing energy about it. The 'Storm' movement (tr 3) is probably the most extrovert moment on the disc, which is considerably emboldened by the virtuoso playing of the Copenhagen Philharmonic's solo cellist, Toke Møldrup, who, in providing an extra timbral voice, ramps up the emotional intensity, especially when he ascends towards those giddying Protecting Veil altitudes. At other times he acts as the protagonist, and for five minutes takes centre stage for his solo 'Ragas and Raginis'.



Four bid farewell: Anonymous 4 with multi-instrumentalist Bruce Molsky say goodbye with an incomparable disc of songs from the American civil war

Mogens Dahl's eponymous 18-strong chamber choir (founded in 2005 and based in Copenhagen) copes with every technical challenge of this fantastically difficult music. Sandström stretches every vocal part with his luscious harmonies, throwing in clusters, hissing, glissandos and bell-like harmonics for good measure. Such vocal dexterity is truly astonishing and well worth exploring and relishing. Malcolm Rilev

### Thuille

Fünf Lieder, Op 4. Drei Frauenlieder von Karl Stieler, Op 5. Drei Gesange, Op 12. Drei Lieder, Op 15. Fünf Lieder, Op 19. Drei Lieder nach Gedichten von Clemens Brentano, Op 24. Drei Lieder, Op 26. Drei Lieder, Op 31. Drei Mädchenlieder nach Gedichten von Wilhelm Hertz, Op 36

Mary Bevan, Sophie Bevan sops Jennifer Johnston mez Joseph Middleton pf Champs Hill (S) (2) CHRCD063 (88' • DDD • T/t)



Champs Hill Records has already given us a set of chamber music by Ludwig Thuille,

the talented Munich composer and

childhood friend of Richard Strauss. This release offers a generous and welcome conspectus of his song output. Comparisons with Strauss (the two men set some of the same texts) and other well-known contemporaries are inevitable, and they reveal Thuille as fluent but conservative, highly skilled at musical description but reluctant - or unable to capture the psychological depth that distinguishes the best song composers.

For a fin de siècle composer, his songs also occasionally seem almost prudish. This is the case with 'Ganymed' (a setting not of Goethe but of the Austrian poet Robert Hamerling) and Thuille's responses to 'Allerseelen' and 'Die Nacht', which sound dutiful and distinctly PG when compared with Strauss's unapologetically grown-up settings.

The first three tracks, the Op 31 settings for three voices and piano from 1904, are an exception, though, with a sensuousness and harmonic daring that's often lacking elsewhere. Here Sophie Bevan and Jennifer Johnston are briefly joined by Mary Bevan, to irresistible effect. Throughout the rest of the set, Johnston proves the more persuasive interpreter, offering a rich, powerful mezzo and a natural responsiveness to the text in her

performances of what, by and large, seem the better songs - her solo 'Waldeinsamkeit' is a highlight. Sophie Bevan has some lovely moments but, by contrast, often feels less comfortable. Both singers should be applauded for bringing this long-forgotten repertoire to life, though, as should Joseph Middleton, who brings sparkle to Thuille's imaginative and charming accompaniments.

**Hugo Shirley** 

### **'1865**'

'Songs of Hope and Home from the American Civil War' Anonymous 4 with Bruce Molsky fiddle/banjo/gtr/voc Harmonia Mundi 🕒 🥯 HMU80 7549



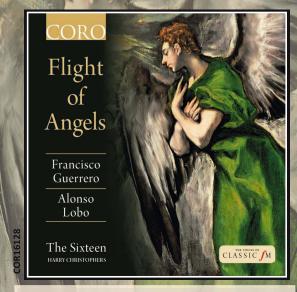
Anonymous 4 are retiring. Not immediately, but the American all-female

vocal quartet have announced their decision to go their separate ways following the 2015-16 season. After three decades and over 20 albums it's still a farewell that comes before time, as their latest release -





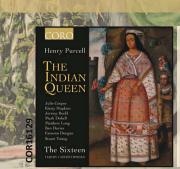
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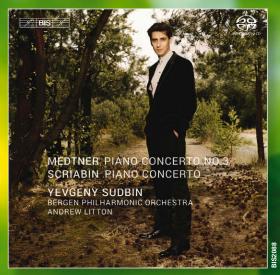
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vocals as clean and programming as original as ever – makes poignantly clear.

Fittingly enough, '1865', released to coincide with the 150th anniversary of the end of the American Civil War, spends a lot of time brooding on goodbyes. Songs from stage, parlour and backwoods explore the separation and loss of the war both from the perspective of the soldiers (on both sides) and the women left behind.

The risk with a project like this is one of tone: inevitably many of the songs tread similar emotional ground, and in a style whose emphatic sweetness can all too easily curdle in a contemporary ear. Anonymous 4 address this neatly by adding the wonderful Bruce Molsky – fiddler, guitarist, banjo player and vocalist – to their number, roughing up the neatly scalloped edges of the music when things threaten to get a bit too precious.

There are still plenty of ballads to the likes of Evelina, Nelly, Aura Lee (the original source of Elvis Presley's 'Love me tender'), some tackled in close-harmony girl-group style, and others with banjo accompaniment. Most successful, however, are the folk and church-influenced numbers – the simplicity of an unaccompanied 'Abide with me' and 'Shall we gather at the river', the intimacy of Molsky's 'Brother Green' accompanied on his fiddle, and the straight-up beauty of the duet 'The True Lover's Farewell'. There simply isn't a recording of comparable quality in this repertoire. Alexandra Coghlan

### 'Au Sainct nau'

Anonymous Conditor alme syderum. Conditor le jour de Noel. O gras tondus Anonymous/
Hollande Plaisir n'ay plus que vivre en desconfort Arcadelt Missa Noe noe - Kyrie; Agnus Dei Costeley Allons gay bergiere
Du Caurroy Fantaisies - No 4 sur Conditor alme syderum; No 30 sur Une jeune fillette; No 31 sur Une jeune fillette. Une jeune pucelle Goudimel Esprits divins, chantons dans la nuit sainte
Janequin II estoyt une fillette Mouton Noe noe psallite noe Pieton O beata infantia Sermizy Au bois de dueil. Dison Nau à pleine teste. L'on sonne une cloche. Vous perdez temps heretiques infames

Ensemble Clément Janequin; Trio Musica Humana / Dominique Visse Alpha (© ALPHA198 (66' • DDD)



It feels like a long time since the last release from Ensemble Clément Janequin.

They've been going for about 35 years, and new recordings have been rarer in recent

years, but this one – issued just in time to brighten my Christmas – is as impressive in its way as anything I've heard from them, and that's saying something.

This musical tableau dramatises the different attitudes to Christmas at the mid-point of the 16th century. It opens with a seasonal plainsong hymn, solemnly intoned, albeit to a ternary lilt. Immediately there follows a parody set to the same tune, and initially sung in the same way, but before the verse is out the tone has begun to change as the text enumerates the victuals gathered at the festive table and describes their increasingly marked effects on the assembled company, the words slurred, the pitching and rhythm listing more and more. It's classic Dominique Visse, and it had me laughing aloud. Thereafter, the disc alternates sacred and secular with immaculate poise. The former is beautifully done - the accompaniment on chamber organ is reminiscent of their past work in this register - and the latter delivered as lustily as ever. Harking back to the ensemble's Protestant psalm project, French chansons have their frankly smutty texts replaced by touching depictions of the Nativity. Towards the conclusion, the tension between Protestants and Catholics bursts out into open hostility in a series of musical pamphlets, in which the two faiths consign each other to the devil with equal venom (and, it must be said, relish).

The ensemble continues to do what it does best but retains a freshness and questing spirit that sometimes eludes groups of comparable vintage, a sense of joyous music-making that marked them out from the start and which they've never lost. It was utterly infectious then, and it still is. Fabrice Fitch

### 'Blow out, ye bugles'

'Music from the time of the First World War'
HW Davies A Short Requiem A Gray 1914
Parry Songs of Farewell Stanford For Io,
I raise up Vaughan Williams Lord, thou
hast been our refuge<sup>a</sup>

Truro Cathedral Choir / Christopher Gray with a Claude Lamon tpt Luke Bond org Regent (© REGCD451 (77' • DDD • T)



This CD's imaginative programme offers music written in response to the events

of the First World War. The five composers have chosen a variety of texts, including Old Testament psalms and poems by Rupert Brooke, John Donne, Henry Vaughan and Isaac Watts. The settings by Walford Davies, Alan Gray and Vaughan Williams have an introverted dignity, with occasional unexpected harmonic progressions hinting at the private grief behind the public façade. In contrast, Stanford and Parry's compositions are more openly emotional, and the latter's *Songs of Farewell* are a *tour de force* of intricate contrapuntal textures.

The Truro Cathedral Choir clearly relish the virtuosity of Parry's choral writing and their singing is always consistently excellent. There's a good blend and balance between the upper and lower voices, thanks to the brightness of the trebles and the restrained, rich tone of the gentlemen, which avoids too operatic a sound. A few times, one might wish for more articulation of the texts, with important words emphasised. However, the *legato* phrasing of the choir under Christopher Grav's calm and mostly unhurried direction lets the music speak eloquently for itself. The slow tempi in Davies's A Short Requiem are profoundly moving, whereas the lively speeds with Luke Bond's colourful and dramatic accompaniment in Stanford's For lo, I raise up make for thrilling listening.

A characteristically fine recording from Gary Cole is complemented by Jeremy Dibble's outstanding booklet-notes. This is a poignant and moving CD, which is a worthy commemoration of the tragic consequences of the First World War.

# Christopher Nickol 'De Passione'

Anonymous O tristu fatale die Compère In nomine Jesu (Officium de Cruce) Josquin Miserere mei, Deus. O Domine Jesu Christe. Qui velatus facie fuisti (Officium de Passione) Obrecht Parce Domine a 4 Weerbeke Tenebrae factae sunt Odhecaton / Paolo Da Col



Cantus (F) C9637 (74' • DDD • T/t)

This issue explores the earliest coherent repertory of what we now call the motet,

namely four-voice Latin devotional pieces; and it does so mainly through not the first but the second printed collection of motets, Ottaviano Petrucci's *Motetti B* (1503), a volume that seems to be largely retrospective and to look back to the 1470s and 1480s. But the main pieces here are among the most restrained and chordal of the entire early motet repertory – Compère's nine-section *Officium de Cruce*, Josquin's five-section *Officium de Passione* and Josquin's six-section *Qui velatus facie*.

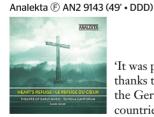
All seem to belong to a generation when the full Mass Ordinary cycle had been the main medium for composers of ambition for about 20 years; and they sought new ways of constructing substantial musical canvases without using the well-known words of the Mass Ordinary.

Paolo Da Col and the 11 men of the ensemble Odhecaton approach the obvious musical problem with courage: they sing robustly and make every effort to keep the music moving. They build the texture very much from the bass upwards, and manage to keep the sound alive without exaggeration or artificiality. Their diction and tuning are admirable, though the texture is not always clear.

Framing these three imposing cycles with two slighter (but marvellous) motets by Obrecht and Weerbeke, they end the disc with two extraneous pieces: the first is a solo Good Friday lament from the Sicilian tradition, *O tristu fatale die*, gloriously sung by Clara Murtas; the other is Josquin's rather later five-voice *Miserere* – in which, once again, the singers resolve its well-known formal difficulties with courageous and forward singing. The booklet is unusually detailed, in four languages and illustrated with a wealth of evocative and relevant pictures. David Fallows

### 'The Heart's Refuge'

J Christoph Bach Aria 'Es ist nun aus mit meinem Leben' Bruhns Ich liege und schlafe Buxtehude Jesu, meines Lebens Leben, BuxWV62 Kuhnau Gott, sei mir gnädig nach deiner Güte Schmelzer Harmonia a 5 Agnes Zsigovics sop Rebecca Claborn mez Kyle Guilfoyle counterten Isaiah Bell ten Alexander Dobson bass Schola Cantorum; Theater of Early Music / Daniel Taylor



'It was primarily thanks to music that the German-speaking countries were able to

recover from the ordeal of the Thirty Years War,' says the booklet-note to this release. Quite a claim, even for a music historian, yet listening to the music of this release you can begin to believe it possible, especially in our present times. For those who suffered the traumas of that gruesome conflict, maybe the restoration to their lives of such ravishing music as this, with its Lutheran tension between torment and consolation and its anticipations of the comforts of death, could indeed have impressed on them a feeling of a return to civilised values.

One is certainly free to wish it so anyway, and these performances by the University of Toronto's Schola Cantorum choir, conducted by Daniel Taylor and reinforced by singers and players from his professional group Theater of Early Music, make it that little bit easier. Dripping with beauty and style, they establish their seriousness of intent from the off - Buxtehude's choral passacaglia meditating on Christ's sacrifice - and continue it through Johann Christoph Bach's aching strophic choral death aria, Schmelzer's chromatically intricate instrumental piece, and two more diverse and sectional cantata-like works in a German Miserere by Kuhnau and a contemplation of death by Bruhns.

The choir shows its youth in a light and pleasing choral sound, though also some intonational insecurity and a certain measure of carefulness which can sap the performances' energy and brightness, and produces few standout moments. Compare the earnest Es ist nun aus here with the exquisite, fervently detailed account under John Eliot Gardiner on SDG, and you'll get an idea of what is really possible. Likewise the soloists, though competent and promising, cannot completely hide their inexperience next to the impressive contribution of guest bass Alexander Dobson. But still, this snapshot of 17th-century German sacred music, if rather short at 49 minutes, is a heartwarming and worthy one.

### Lindsay Kemp

Bach – selected comparison: Gardiner (12/11) (SDG) SDG715

### 'Melancholy'

Brahms Ophelia-Lieder (arr Reimann)
Busch Drei Lieder Canteloube Colloque
sentimental Chausson Chanson perpétuelle,
Op 37 Grechaninov Tote Blätter Hindemith
Melancholie, Op 13 - No 3, Dunkler Tropfe;
No 4, Traumwald Lekeu Nocturne Rabl Zu spät
Schillings Abenddämmerung R Strauss Stiller
Gang, Op 31 No 4
Lucia Duchoňová mez

Ulrike Payer pf Asasello Quartet Capriccio (F) C5144 (49' • DDD • T)



This is an intriguing programme from the Slovakian mezzo-soprano Lucia

Duchoňová, consisting largely of works some way off the beaten track. Brahms's five *Ophelia-Lieder* are the main exception but are here given in Aribert Reimann's gentle and muted (in both senses) arrangements for voice and string quartet.

On the rest of the disc Duchoňová is accompanied by the various configurations offered by the Asasello Quartet and the pianist Ulrike Payer, whose contributions are generally excellent.

I'm less won over by the mezzo's slightly acidic, tremulous tone, which is not sensuous or alluring enough to persuade me that either Chausson's 'Chanson perpétuelle', with the banal rhyming triplets of its text, or Canteloube's rather matter-of-fact 'Colloque sentimental' are worth returning to. Walter Rabl's brief 'Zu spät' is more interesting, Lekeu's 'Nocturne' undoubtedly seductive. The three charming Adolf Busch songs, accompanied by viola and piano, are beautifully crafted, as, in its somewhat more episodic way, is Max von Schillings's 'Abenddämmerung'.

The central sets of quartet-accompanied songs are the clear highlights. The two Hindemith songs are entrancing, with forbidding, spare pizzicato textures in 'Dunkler Tropfe' and unsettling harmonies in 'Traumwald'. Grechaninov's 'Dead Leaves' offer something like a mini tonepoem in their accompaniments, each of which is vividly realised by the Asasello Quartet. But here, as elsewhere on the disc, one gets the sense that the instrumentalists are more closely engaged with the texts than Duchoňová herself. The only translations of the texts we get in the poorly edited booklet, incidentally, are German translations of the Grechaninov. **Hugo Shirley** 

### 'Rameau's Funeral'

Gilles Messe des morts interpolated with
Rameau Castor et Pollux - Tristes apprêts.
Dardanus - Gravement; Rondeau tendre.
Zoroastre - Air des esprits infernaux
Judith van Wanroij sop Robert Getchell counterten
Juan Sancho tenor Lisandro Abadie bass
Collegium Vocale Gent; Capriccio Stravagante
Les 24 Violons / Skip Sempé
Paradizo ® PA0013 (00' • DDD)
Recorded live at St Walburga Church, Bruges, 2014



You can listen to this disc from Skip Sempé, Capriccio Stravagante Les 24 Violons and

Collegium Vocale Gent in the normal way, but once you've finished enjoying the cloudy brass textures, crisp choral articulation and athletic solo passages, there's a whole additional level of musical interest to be found here.

This interest lies in unpicking the roughly-sewn seams of Jean Gilles's Messe



 $Recreating\ Rameau's\ funeral:\ Skip\ Semp\'e\ recording\ with\ Collegium\ Vocale\ Gent\ and\ Capriccio\ Stravagante\ Les\ 24\ Violons\ at\ St\ Walburga's\ Church\ in\ Bruges\ Church\ i$ 

des morts in its 1764 version, recomposed for Rameau's funeral by François Rebel and François Francoeur, to reveal the sources of the contrasting material within. At least 12 versions of the Gilles Requiem survive. Popularity kept it in fashion long after its musical style had ceased to be current, with interpolations made in each case to fit it to the particular occasion.

This disc aims to recreate the complete music of Rameau's funeral service, supplementing the Mass itself with extracts from *Dardanus*, *Castor et Pollux* and *Zoroastre* according to information from historical sources. The result is a bizarre but attractive mixture of 17th- and 18th-century styles (occasionally colliding in the same movement), with only the suddenly Italianate *Elévation* breaking the makeshift unity of the whole.

Gilles's own music is knot-garden formal, all stately processionals and filigree solo verse sections. Though lovingly performed here, it just doesn't stand up to Rameau's own musical invention, which announces itself every time it appears, seizing the ear with character. The string opening to 'Tristes apprêts' from *Castor* offers a ravishing interlude after the *Sanctus*, and the *Kyrie* – an adaption of 'Que tout gemisse', also from *Castor* – brings

with it all the poised despair of its original source. As anniversary tributes to Rameau go, this is not only among the quirkiest but also the most evocative. Alexandra Coghlan

### 'Russia'

Glinka Hymn Gubaidulina Hommage à Marina Tsvetayeva Rachmaninov O Theodokos, immer wachend im Gebet Schnittke Drei geistliche Gesänge Taneyev Twelve Choruses, Op 27 - excs Tchaikovsky The Cherubic Hymn Wakako Nakaso sop Sabine Czinczel contr Alexander Yudenkov ten Mikhail Shashkov bass SWR Vocal Ensemble, Stuttgart / Marcus Creed Hänssler Classic (F) CD93 317 (62' • DDD • T/t)



This is a Russian choral album with a difference, offering not only the rich,

diatonic panoply of Glinka's cherubim and Tchaikovsky's seraphim, but also expressions of dissidence and dissonance from Gubaidulina and Tsvetayeva. The opening surprise is that Schnittke's *Three Hymns* of 1984 belong more to the former than the latter aesthetic. Philip Clark reckoned them 'pleasant but slight sketches' (2/14) – but he was listening to

the plusher sound and more rounded edges of the Bavarian Radio Choir. These are simple, chordal settings, gently shaded with the open sixths and suspended dissonance more characteristic of Lauridsen and Nystedt than the composer of the *Penitential Psalms* previously recorded by these forces (6/12).

If you've heard that disc, you won't expect the SWR Vokalensemble to shroud Rachmaninov in clouds of vibrato, but they show that he doesn't need it. Precision and clarity can be taken for granted with them as it can with the Bavarian and Swedish Radio choirs, for example, but what sets these recordings apart is the direct engagement with and forward projection of the text. Sung by the Netherlands Chamber Choir on Globe, Taneyev's 12 settings of Yakov Polonsky are lush and almost indigestibly rich, a Russian counterpart to Strauss's Deutsche Motette. The last three are the most harmonically overloaded music on the new disc but Creed shapes Polonsky's overheated nature imagery as sympathetically as he does Tsvetayeva's text from a century and a world away. The booklet includes helpful introductions by Dorothea Redepenning and sung texts and translations in Cyrillic Russian, German and English. Peter Quantrill

# REISSUES

**James Jolly** on Decca's Phase 4 Stereo Concert Series box, two symphony cycles and a trio of fine reissues

Decca's Phase 4 returns

ecca's **Phase 4 Stereo** was an interesting initiative launched in 1961 that exploited multichannel recording (first in 10 tracks and then in 20). Initially it was used for pop music and sound-effect discs (exploiting the full width of the stereo picture, so ping-pong balls would bounce between the speakers or things would shoot across the 'gap'), but in 1964 classical music received the treatment and a 'Concert Series' was launched. And now Decca has issued a box of 41 CDs drawn from this rich catalogue.

In terms of musical aesthetics, Phase 4 marked a new departure in which fidelity to the concert-hall experience (as championed by, say, Mercury Living Presence with its simple microphone arrangement) was replaced by something much more 'artificial' and interventionist – the requirement for the conductor to balance the sound *in situ* was no longer so pressing, as the many channels could be remixed later in an additional stage in the process.

Phase 4 was steered with colossal energy by Tony D'Amato, a New Yorker of Italian extraction, who must have been very persuasive as he managed to sign a group of conductors who not only 'got' the concept but entered wholeheartedly into the process. Musicians of the stature of Antal Dorati, Erich Leinsdorf, Charles Munch, Anatole Fistoulari and Leopold Stokowski were soon recording for the label and, as one of the Phase 4 producers Tim McDonald reveals in his lively and enormously entertaining note, 'D'Amato's classical releases began to outsell [Decca's] own label!' But Phase 4 also engaged conductors such as Stanley Black and Bernard Herrmann, who are best remembered for their work in the fields of dance, jazz and film, yet who proved very fine in the lighter classical repertoire (Herrmann was a noted champion of new music and had conducted the premieres of works by Ives, Malipiero, Myaskovsky, Rubbra and others). Another conductor from the 'lighter' music field who was persuaded to record for the label was Arthur Fiedler of Boston Pops fame.

A returns

Complete with its original artwork, Decca's Phase 4 takes on a new lease of life

The bulk of the repertoire D'Amato opted for tended to be highly coloured, often rhythmically exciting and sat towards the lighter end of classical – the kind of music you might hear at outdoor summer concerts or pops-type events. It's music that is popular for a very good reason: it's simply great fun to listen to.

It's worth pointing out immediately that the effects employed by the Phase 4 engineers (invariably Arthurs Lilley and Bannister) are musical and generally pretty tasteful. The result is a little like watching a film in 3D: sometimes instruments seem to float out of the orchestra, but rarely distractingly so. (If you listen with headphones, things will obviously strike you with even more immediacy.)

Disc 13, 'The Fantasy Film World of Bernard Herrmann' (engineered by Arthur Lilley in Kingsway Hall in 1973) is stunningly recorded and while the sound is certainly not realistic in concert-hall terms, it presents a glorious aural picture. The percussion in The Day the Earth Stood Still positively glistens and the mood of anticipation is evoked with a real master's touch. The slightly drier sound of Decca's West Hampstead Studio No 3 suits Psycho perfectly on a collection of 'Great Movie Thrillers' (Herrmann swapping the NPO for the LPO here). Scores for Marnie, North by Northwest and Vertigo complete the disc. Staying with film, Miklós Rózsa conducts music from his own luscious score for Ben-Hur in a terrific recording (the de luxe brass section of the National Philharmonic is heard to magnificent effect in a Walthamstow Town Hall recording engineered by Stanley Goodall).

Colour certainly spills out of a Khachaturian collection from Stanley Black (*Spartacus* and *Masquerade* suites), beautifully played by the LSO. And Black's Gershwin (*Rhapsody in Blue* and *An American in Paris*), supplemented by Herrmann conducting the '*I got rhythm*' *Variations*, has lashings of atmosphere and fizz; the Phase 4 engineering certainly comes into its own here.

Antal Dorati conducts a fine performance of Orff's *Carmina Burana* (though I find the acoustic a little swimmy), a nicely judged Dvořák *New World* and Kodály *Háry János*, colourful Rossini/Respighi (*La boutique fantasque* and *Rossiniana*) and, replacing Sir Malcolm Sargent (as recalled very amusingly in the note), supports Sean Connery in *Peter and the Wolf* and *The Young's Person's Guide to the Orchestra*.

Leopold Stokowski conducts some of the most exciting performances in this set – Beethoven's Ninth, Berlioz's Symphonie fantastique, his own transcription of Mussorgsky's Pictures at an Exhibition (well worth hearing as a change from Ravel's), Rimsky-Korsakov's Sheherazade, Tchaikovsky's Fifth and suites from Swan Lake and The Sleeping Beauty, a Wagner orchestral music selection, a programme of his own Bach transcriptions and – bigband, yes, but not too soupy – Vivaldi's The Four Seasons. Hugh Bean is a very stylish soloist with beautifully focused and almost ethereal tone in slow movements.

A few other soloists are featured, including Ivan Davis in the Liszt piano concertos and Rachmaninov's Second – often at daringly extreme tempi but full of character; Israela Margalit in Prokofiev's

Third Piano Concerto (conducted by her then-husband Lorin Maazel); Ilana Vered in solo works by Beethoven, Schubert and Stravinsky as well as a Mozart piano concerto (K467) coupled, bizarrely, with the Chinese Yellow River Concerto; Ruggiero Ricci in the Tchaikovsky and Mendelssohn violin concertos, and singers Marilyn Horne in Carmen excerpts, Eileen Farrell in show tunes and Robert Merrill in 'Americana' (very classy, great sound and hugely enjoyable!). And there's plenty more (a Leinsdorf Mahler First, a Beethoven Pastoral from Henry Lewis, a complete Fistoulariconducted Swan Lake) and a great bonus disc, 'Battle Stereo', which demonstrates Phase 4 engineering at its most imaginative in a programme of speech, sound effects, marches and scenes from six famous wars. Masterminded by Bob Sharples, it's a highly atmospheric sonic spectacle.

The discs are housed in individual sleeves replicating the original LPs, so arm yourself with a powerful magnifying glass if you want to read the notes (though I'm not sure they're really meant to be read), and the

CDs are designed to look like miniature LPs. All in all, a terrific memento of an enterprising period in Decca's long history (expect to pay around £90). There's also a six-LP edition that includes, inter alia, the Mozart/Yellow River coupling, the Bernard Herrmann Fantasy scores, Sheherazade, Dorati's New World and a Charles Munch Bizet trio (again, listed at around £90).

he British baritone John Shirley-Quirk died last August at the age of 82. A committed champion of new music (he created a number of Britten roles, including the multi-character baritone parts in Death in Venice), Shirley-Quirk was also a wonderful interpreter of song. Heritage Records has gathered together a collection of English songs from three Saga LPs, sensitively remastered, which show this wonderful singer on top form (around the £12 mark in the shops). When one of the LPs was reviewed back in September 1963, Alec Robertson commented that he could 'think of no other singer today who understands so well how to give full value to consonants, wherever they occur in a word. He has, also, not only a feeling for words, but the ability to colour



John Shirley-Quirk: magnificent in songs from the British Isles

his tone, always without any exaggeration; and the ability also to spin his tone into a beautiful and well supported mezza-voce. Add to all this great sensitivity and vitality and you have an artist of remarkable gifts.' Partnered by pianists Viola Tunnard, Martin Isepp and Eric Parkin, Shirley-Quirk gives us a lovely cross-section of native song, including Vaughan Williams's Songs of Travel, Ireland's Sea Fever, his Five Thomas Hardy settings and Songs Sacred and Profane, as well as songs by Stanford, Keel, Warlock, Butterworth (Six Songs from 'A Shropshire Lad') and Moeran, and from an earlier age, Purcell and Pelham Humfrey. Characteristically informed and affectionate notes by Tully Potter provide context, and Shirley-Quirk's immaculate diction makes texts unnecessary.

I must mention a two-CD Australian Eloquence set of early Berlin recordings from a youthful Lorin Maazel, 20th-Century Portraits. With the Radio Symphony Orchestra he conducts an absolutely terrific pair of Falla performances - El Amor brujo with Grace Bumbry on magnificent form and the

dances from El sombrero de tres picos.

Though it's been out for a few months,

Rhythmically buoyant, light of foot and vividly coloured, they sound quite superb for their age (1966). Also with the RSO come the 1919 suite from Stravinsky's Firebird and Le chant du rossignol - the 1956 sound is excellent and the attention to detail very Maazel. A brace of Bartók performances finds the conductor, in 1981, in front of the Berlin Philharmonic – if these were to be judged on sound alone, the Concerto for Orchestra would win hands down. It's stunningly recorded with plentiful detail and a fine sense of perpective. But what of the performance? Equally impressive somewhat in the Karajan mould: cool, rather suave but well detailed, and the playing of the Berlin Phil is really topdrawer. The Two Images (or Pictures) make a good addition to the programme - again, elegantly done.

From the LSO and Richard Bonynge comes an enchanting collection of Ballet Music and **Entr'actes from French Opera** recorded in Kingsway Hall in 1971 (engineered by James Lock). This is the sort of fare

that Paul Paray used to do incomparably in Detroit, but the LSO has plenty of style too, and the music has great charm. Composers include Meyerbeer, Massenet, Gounod, Boïeldieu, Bizet, Saint-Saëns and Auber, and this CD release also contains two recordings making their first appearance in any format: the Entr'acte to Act 3 of Massenet's Les Erinnyes (not actually a French opera but incidental music) and the Prelude to Act 3 of Delibes's Kassya. Both are delightful, but the real gem in the collection is the 'Invocation' (or 'Elégie') from Les Erinnyes with Douglas Cummings playing the solo cello. Nicely informative notes by Paul Westcott.

### THE RECORDINGS

Phase 4 Stereo Concert Series Various artists

Decca (\$) (41 discs) 478 4769DB41:

(F) (6) ● 478 7662DB6

English Song John Shirley-Quirk Heritage ® 2 HTGCD283/4



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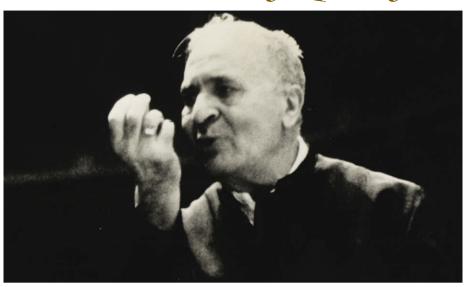
Berlin RSO and PO / Lorin Maazel

Australian Eloquence ® 2 480 8477

Ballet Music and Entr'actes from French Opera LSO / Richard Bonynge

Australian Eloquence ® 480 8480

# Two unmissable symphony sets



Bruno Walter's Columbia Symphony Orchestra Brahms glows with Californian sunlight

t's easy to forget, at this remove, what a major figure the conductor Bruno Walter was in 20th-century musical life, particularly as figures such as Toscanini and Furtwängler seem to have assumed God-like positions which somewhat distort historical perspective. Having worked closely as a young man with Gustav Mahler, Walter went on to hold some of the biggest conducting jobs in pre-war Europe – he headed the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra and the Bavarian State Opera, held a guest post with the Concertgebouw Orchestra and appeared regularly at La Scala, Covent Garden and with the Vienna and Berlin Philharmonics. He was also a devoted champion of new music (he was a composer himself). As a Jew, he was forced to flee Europe after the Anschluss and after the war he settled in the United States where he worked with many of the leading orchestras (he held an advisory post with the New York Phil immediately at the end of the 1940s).

Late in his life he enjoyed something of an Indian summer when working with the Columbia Symphony Orchestra, an ensemble created by Columbia Records, aka CBS, from freelance musicians based in Los Angeles (slightly confusingly there was also an East Coast Columbia Symphony which drew on New York musicians and with which Beecham, Stravinsky and Bernstein, among others, recorded). With this magnificent Californian ensemble Walter, a man of great gentleness and integrity, recorded much of his core repertoire. Sony Classical has recently reissued Walter's Brahms recordings (following earlier sets devoted to Mozart

and Mahler, not to mention a lavish 39-disc Bruno Walter Edition).

If you don't know Walter's recordings, this is a good place to start as it provides a perfect introduction to his wonderfully humane music-making. As well as the four symphonies, the overtures and the *Haydn* Variations, this five-CD set also contains the *Schicksalslied* and the *Alto Rhapsody* (Mildred Miller) and, with the New York Philharmonic, the Double Concerto

# Walter's Brahms exudes affection (the players clearly adored their conductor)

(Francescatti and Fournier). A German Requiem (Seefried and London) and a quartet of Hungarian Dances. There's a sense of rightness about Walter's Brahms - the orchestral playing exudes affection (the players clearly adored their conductor) and the overall mood is generally lyrical. But don't think for a moment that these performances bask in some kind of constant autumnal glow - there's fibre here, too, and considerable power. Of the four symphonies, I've always loved Walter's way with the central two - No 2 has a warmth and glow about it that doesn't preclude the mystery the work should also surely embrace and No 3 comes close to perfection, a performance that satisfies on every level. The outer symphonies occasionally let the tension sag, though Walter maintains pretty constant tempi throughout, but there's still a huge amount to enjoy. The Academic Festival

Overture is superb – humorous, sparkling and genuinely capable of putting a smile on the lips! Elsewhere, the performance of the Double Concerto is very similar, in Walter's approach, to his earlier CBS version with Isaac Stern and Leonard Rose – here I find Francescatti's tone a little wiry (Stern is ideal here) but I marginally prefer Pierre Fournier to Rose.

Of the choral works, A German Requiem, recorded in 1954, shows its age with a slightly veiled sound but with a performance of this stature you soon adjust and are drawn in completely. The Westminster Choir sing with focused tone and sound quite youthful (if a little distantly placed, and the sound frays slightly at climaxes). George London is an authoritative presence with his beautifully tight and firm sound; Irmgard Seefried floats her solo perfectly in the fifth movement. The Alto Rhapsody, from 1961, has much more immediacy of sound and a terrific sense of atmosphere: Mildred Miller is a fine soloist who really works with the words. This five-disc box (with absolutely no documentation beyond what's printed on each sleeve) will set you back about £17 - strongly recommended.

David Zinman's way with Beethoven is much better known: dynamic, taut and often very exciting. His set of the symphonies, superbly recorded, is still the one I go back to for a recent cycle that balances modern scholarship with traditional instruments (I'm particularly fond of Nos 3 and 4). Well, Sony Classical has gathered together the bulk of Zinman's Beethoven recordings on 11 CDs (the only thing missing is his Missa solemnis). So, as well as the nine symphonies, there are two discs of overtures, the five piano concertos in excellent performances by Yefim Bronfman, the Violin Concerto and Romances (Christian Tetzlaff) and Triple Concerto (Gil Shaham, Truls Mørk and Bronfman). The box - again no notes - will set you back about £27 and will give great pleasure if you respond to Zinman's characterful way with this composer. This is music that never loses its power to thrill and move, and Zinman and the Zurich Tonhalle Orchestra are magnificent companions. 6

### THE RECORDINGS

**Bruno Walter conducts Brahms** 

Sony Classical (\$) (5) 88843 07529-2

**David Zinman conducts Beethoven**Sony Classical (§) (1) 88843 07592-2



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# Opera



## Peter Quantrill watches Parsifal from the Royal Opera House:

'Amfortas at once commands the stage while wishing to relinquish it in an immensely moving portrayal' ▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 94



## David Vickers listens to a disc of arias by Italians in Austria:

'Such rarefied beauty and intelligence means that any risk of textural monotony is defily side-stepped' ▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 95

### **Braunfels**

Verkündigung	
Robert Holl bass	Andreas Gradherz
Hanna Schwarz mez	The Mother
Juliane Banse sop	Violaine
Janina Baechle sop	Mara
Adrian Eröd bar	Jakobäus
Matthias Klink ten	Peter von Ulm
Mauro Peter ten	Peter's Assistant
Vanessa Goikoetxea sop	Angel
Johannes Stermann bass	Labourer
Bavarian Radio Chorus; Munich	Radio Orchestra /
Ulf Schirmer	

BR-Klassik © @ 900311 (134' • DDD • T) Recorded live at the Prinzregententheater, Munich. December 17-18. 2011



With this release, Annunciation (1934-37) achieves its second commercial CD

recording. Check out Michael Oliver's July 1994 *Gramophone* review of the first – EMI's (also live) Cologne performance – for an exhaustive and fair survey of the difficulties with Braunfels's dramaturgy and musical setting of Paul Claudel's 'mystery' *L'Annonce faite à Marie*. The heroine Violaine undergoes endless Job-like suffering (but with a Marian submission) as she contracts leprosy out of pity, is exiled for supposed adultery, goes blind and is then left for dead after violence from the heartless sister whose baby she has (literally) just resurrected.

If this is not already too much for non-Catholics and non-spiritualists, the fact that (as MEO points out) 'moments of insight and mystical vision are dramatised, more everyday events, such as there are, are not' may alienate further. The almost final stage direction – 'from here on the stage is filled with light which gives the following an unreal character' – may be said to apply throughout most of the action. A close following of the libretto is essential but, regrettably, BR-Klassik has assumed its purchasers have fluent German and Latin.

The attraction of the release is Braunfels's contribution to new operatic

form. Given a coherent stage production, the fact that his action is almost wholly mental and intellectual rather than physical and epic would not be a problem. His orchestration is imaginative, colourful and unpredictable. Try the great pile-up of themes and instrumental voices when Andreas the father announces his pilgrimage to Jerusalem (Act 1). Or the moment of the actual 'annunciation' (Act 3): the Midnight Mass bells and angel choir (only heard by Violaine) and the real arrival of the real King combine to provide an image of every element of the Nativity story. And Braunfels achieves this running climax without the über-resources of a Pfitzner or a Korngold. But is the music memorable? There's the rub.

Passionately projected by Ulf Schirmer, the performance casts the main parts well, with Banse virtuoso in the high tessitura of Violaine, Schwarz as reliably colourful as ever as the Mother and Matthias Klink imaginative as the chief architect. The curious may proceed.

#### Mike Ashman

Comparative version: DR Davies (7/94) (EMI) 555104-2

Handel	DVD S
Rodelinda	
Danielle de Niese sop	Rodelinda
Bejun Mehta counterten	Bertarido
Kurt Streit ten	Grimoaldo
Konstantin Wolff bass	Garibaldo
Matthias Rexroth counterten	Unulfo
Malena Ernman mez	Eduige
Compositive Marcione Wiley / Nilvolon	

Concentus Musicus Wien / Nikolaus Harnoncourt

Stage director Philipp Harnoncourt

Video director Paul Landsmann

PCM stereo • O • s)
Recorded live at the Theater an der Wien, Vienna,
March 20, 2011



This production is something of a family affair because the stage director is the

conductor's son. Set in a revolving architectural compound inspired by a fusion of Piranesi and Escher, the staging has a fair few flaws but it also offers a mostly astute examination of characters – all of whom are portrayed as layered human beings.

Some ideas work powerfully, such as Bertarido's first entrance ('Dove sei') finding him down and out with the homeless, and reading news of his death in an old newspaper (instead of reading the inscription on his own tomb). Other ideas, such as the suppression of all but the middle section of Rodelinda's defiant 'Morrai sì', are clumsy errors of judgement. All the gun-pointing in 'Spietati, io vi giurai' misses the point and is wholly implausible, and the implication that the honourable servant Unulfo is a wife-beater is gratuitously horrible. However, as usual with such productions, things settle down and work best in Act 3: the circumstances of misunderstanding related to Bertarido's liberation from prison are depicted poignantly, and reserving the final chorus for an encore by the cast taking their final bows is a really nice idea.

Concentus Musicus Wien and Nikolaus Harnoncourt approach every movement as a fresh piece with regards to rhythm and texture, without lapsing into complacent formula, even if the musical results are a mixed bag. Danielle de Niese's afflicted Rodelinda, under pressure from the usurper Grimoaldo, is acted to a T but over-laboured vocal delivery, shaky vibrato and dodgy tuning work against the musical line in 'Ombre piante'; her performance of 'Ritorna, oh caro e dolce mio tesoro' is genuinely moving. Bejun Mehta's mannered Bertarido often acts petulantly and ineffectually but bassoons and recorders conjure an emotive pastoral atmosphere in 'Con rauco mormorio', and his eventual moment of moral triumph is delivered magnificently ('Vivi tiranno') and shows the character's trajectory from outcast to hero. Konstantin Wolff is an ideally villainous Garibaldo, whose advocacy of evil tyranny in 'Tirannia gli

diede il regno' is chilling, and Unulfo's breezy 'Un zeffiro spirò' is conducted and played as a whispered secret (and it feels absolutely right). Kurt Streit's voice is more effortful in quick music than it used to be but his eloquent sotto voce in the anguished tyrant's 'Pastorello d'un povero armento' is enthralling; his relationship with Malena Ernman's complicated Eduige is given just as much care and depth as the principal heroic couple, and the closing stages of the opera are enacted with integrity.

Although uneven and flawed, this is the antithesis musically and dramatically to the New York Met's glammy pseudo-Baroque production by the amiable team of Stephen Wadsworth and Harry Bicket. Without a doubt, the Harnoncourts reach far deeper into profound emotional situations and feelings but leave some collateral damage along the way. David Vickers

Selected comparison:

Bicket (2/13) (DECC) № 074 3469DX2; ≥ 074 3470DH

### Milhaud

### 

University of Michigan Chamber Choir, University Choir, Orpheus Singers, UMS Choral Union, Percussion Ensemble and Symphony Orchestra / Kenneth Kiesler

Naxos ® 3 8 660349/51 (141' • DDD • S) Recorded live at Hill Auditorium, Ann Arbor, MI, April 4, 2013



For those who mainly know Milhaud for his exotic, jazzy, congenial orchestral

suites, his terse string quartets and eyecrossing productivity (400-plus opus numbers), this three-part epic spread over three discs comes as a shock with its successfully sustained length, seething dramatic intensity and musical language that anticipates better-known (but not necessarily better) works, such as the harmonic starkness of Stravinsky (*Oedipus Rex*), the dramaturgical spareness of Orff (*Antigonae*) and the heroism of Rózsa (*Ben-Hur*). Written with the audacity of a composer too young to fear the

enormousness of the endeavour, *L'Orestie d'Eschyle* ('The Oresteia of Aeschylus') covers the narrative territory of Strauss's *Elektra* but keeps going on to the more philosophical terrains after Orestes murders his adulterous mother, is pursued by the loyalist Eumenides and then put to trial by a jury of Athenians. Strauss gives these mythological figures a modern humanity; the Milhaud incarnations wrestle with universal laws of existence, the violation of which shred the overall social fabric.

The saga unfolds in tandem with Milhaud's creative development throughout his twenties between 1913 and 1923, and becomes part of the larger narrative. Earliest parts – 'L'Agamemnon' and second instalment 'Les Choéphores' ('The Libation Bearers') – tend towards ostinato-driven modules, giving way to more sweeping through-composed music and considerable rhythmic savagery.

Though endlessly inventive, solo vocal writing is confined to a narrow chant-like range. The most distinctive passages of 'Les Choéphores' dispense with singing completely, with aggressive chant accompanied only by percussion. Though the rest of the saga is indeed sung, such chanting seems to be the composer's inner point of reference. It's a monster of a piece, this first recording of the whole thing owing its existence to William Bolcom, a Milhaud student in the 1950s who no doubt realised that the only hope for a modern revival was the kind of combined forces offered by the University of Michigan (where he's faculty composer).

The steep vocal and dramatic challenges of L'Orestie are indeed met, not always spectacularly, but with more authority than the 1960 'Les Euménides' archival recording from the Institut National de l'Audiovisuel conducted by Charles Bruck (INA Archives, available on qobuz.com), or Leonard Bernstein's choral forces in his 1961 'Les Choéphores' (Sony, 10/97). The Michigan soloists are good to excellent, especially Kristin Eder as Electra (a more lyrical incarnation than Strauss's). Choruses do well with the French language and the orchestra shows occasional signs of labour (to be expected), though everyone sounds mightiest amid the most challenging polytonal sections of 'Les Euménides'.

Igor Markevitch's 1957 'Les Choéphores' recording (DG, 5/58, 4/97) – with its insistently muscular orchestral sonorities, aggressive sense of rhythm and greater immediacy in the recorded sound – suggests just how compelling *L'Orestie* could be. But as it stands, the present recording is much

more than a stopgap, and hopefully the beginning of a long-delayed performance life of a work that speaks vividly to our times. David Patrick Steams

### Mozart

Fiordiligi
Dorabella
Despina
Ferrando
Guglielmo
Don Alfonso



Like Nikolaus Harnoncourt, René Jacobs et al before him, the Greek-born,

Russian-domiciled conductor Teodor Currentzis positions himself as a Mozartian agent provocateur, bent on roughing things up. If you read the long booklet interview, by turns illuminating and pretentious, you'll have a fair idea of what to expect. From the frantic Overture, conducted as if on hot coals, this is a Così of violent extremes. Tempi tend to be either breathlessly fast or – say, in the girls' initial duet - languorously slow. Dynamic contrasts are played up for all their worth, and beyond, with the Perm orchestra consistently favoured in the balance. Accents detonate like nuclear missiles. Recitatives hurtle precipitately into arias and ensembles. The continuo group is reinforced by lute and demotic hurdygurdy, while the facetious keyboard chuckles and flourishes make Jacobs's fortepiano seem a model of self-denial.

If *Così* is, along with Verdi's *Falstaff*, the ensemble opera par excellence, the casting of Fiordiligi, especially, is crucial. With her slender, agile soprano, deployed with minimal vibrato, Simone Kermes makes Fiordiligi unusually vulnerable and introverted. Both in aria and ensemble she often deploys a frail, slightly breathy tone, à la Bartoli, as if testing the limits of softness. It's a performance of subtle intelligence, though as with her Countess in Currentzis's *Figaro* (3/14), I sometimes craved a fuller, warmer timbre.

With a similarly light, almost 'instrumental' timbre, Malena Ernman characterises the flighty Dorabella with zest and blends well with Kermes in their mellifluous chains of thirds. Except in a rather bland 'Un' aura amorosa' (where Currentzis's soporific beat does him no

favours), Kenneth Tarver makes an ardent and elegant Ferrando, while until his moment of betrayal the mellow-toned Christopher Maltman is all blithe, jack-thelad insouciance as Guglielmo. The conspirators make their mark, too, especially Anna Kasyan's brightly sung, slyly timed Despina, though I wish she'd been less lavish with the cackling laughter.

If Currentzis can push the lusty period band to the edge of the possible, instrumental colours are startlingly vivid. Rarely are so you aware of Mozart's novel use of trumpets as surrogate horns, a brittle foil to the sensuous tinta of clarinets and bassoons. Several scenes have a thrilling manic energy. Yet for all the colour and theatricality, I found it hard to rid myself of the feeling that Currentzis is striving too self-consciously for effect. There's an intermittent charismatic brilliance here. But for a Così in similar mould, vet admitting of more grace and wit, I suspect that René Jacobs is likely to wear better on repeated hearings. Richard Wigmore Selected comparison:

Jacobs (5/99) (HARM) HMC90 1663/5

### Rebel

Ulvsse

Stéphanie Révidat, Céline Ricci, Eugénie Warnier sops Guillemette Laurens mez Vincent Lièvre-Picard counterten Bertrand Chuberre, Thomas van Essen bars Bernard Deletré bass La Choeur du Marais; La Simphonie du Marais / Hugo Reyne

Musiques à la Chabotterie (9) (2) 605003 (126' • DDD • S/T)



If the name Jean-Féry Rebel (1666-1747) rings any bells, it is probably

as the composer of a chamber work, *Les élémens*. But he also wrote *Ulysse*, a Lullian *tragédie en musique* performed at the Paris Opéra in January 1703 and apparently never revived. Hugo Reyne has done a sterling job in marrying the contemporary published score with a set of parts held by the library in Uppsala. There are cuts, both vocal and instrumental; but what remains is a useful addition, very well performed, to the handful of recordings of French operas composed between Lully's *Acis et Galatée* (1686) and Rameau's *Hippolyte et Aricie* (1733).

After the obligatory Prologue in praise of Louis XIV, which surprisingly features Orpheus, the action begins in the garden of Ulysses's palace on Ithaca. Penelope is awaiting her husband's belated return

from Troy. Urilas laments her failure to respond to his approaches; Circe, the sorceress, vows to bewitch Penelope into infidelity, thereby clearing the field for her own designs on Ulysses. After various vicissitudes, and interventions by the gods, husband and wife are reunited and Circe is defeated.

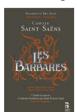
The drama is not thrilling, frankly. Urilas is written out as an individual in Act 2 and Ulysses doesn't enter till Act 3, so there's no confrontation between husband and would-be lover. The ending is downbeat: neither a love duet nor a chorus of triumph but a solo for Circe as she abandons love for ever. But many excellent numbers stand out: an air for Circe accompanied only by flutes, followed by a Rondeau of gentle melancholy; a duet for Circe and Ulysses with a chromatic descending bass reminding us that all is not well; a solemn chorus for Ulysses's companions.

The cast, led by Bertrand Chuberre and Guillemette Laurens, tuck into their roles with relish, and Hugo Reyne has a winning way with the dance rhythms. The libretto provided is only in French, which, given the quality of the translated synopsis – 'Urilas bursts into pains', for example – is probably just as well. Richard Lawrence

### Saint-Saëns

***************************************	
Les barbares	
Catherine Hunold sop	Floria
Julia Gertseva mez	Livie
Edgaras Montvidas ten	Marcomir
Jean Teitgen bass	Reciter/Scaurus
Shawn Mathey ten	Watchman
Philippe Rouillon bar	Hildibrath/High Priest
Tigran Guiragosyan ten	First Inhabitant
Laurent Pouliaude ten	Second Inhabitant
Ghezlane Hanzazi mez	A Woman
Saint-Etienne Loire Lyric C	horus and Symphony
Orchestra / Laurent Campe	ellone

Editiones Singulaires © 2 ES1017 (120' • DDD)



Of Saint-Saëns's 12 operas, only the second, *Samson et Dalila*, is well known. Now, thanks to the enterprise of the Fondation Bru and its

'Centre de musique romantique française', comes the opportunity to investigate opera number 9. *Les barbares* was commissioned by the City of Orange for performance in the town's Roman theatre, where the action of the opera takes place. That the story is set in the first century BC, well before the theatre was built, doesn't seem to have troubled anybody much. In the end, logistical problems meant that the premiere

was given at the Paris Opéra, in October 1901; the illustrations in the handsome book that encloses the discs include a photograph of the two oxen that pulled the chariots.

The librettists were Victorien Sardou and Pierre-Barthélémy Gheussi, Les barbares is in a line of descent from Norma, The Pearl Fishers and Lakmé, though it lacks the exotic setting of the last two. The Teuton barbarians have invaded Roman Gaul. During the battle outside the theatre, Livie's husband is killed; she vows to avenge him. Her sister Floria is the chief vestal virgin. Marcomir, leader of the barbarians, is so smitten with Floria that he offers to spare the Romans if she will love him. After a brief resistance, Floria agrees. She renounces her priesthood and they prepare to leave; but Livie, discovering that it was Marcomir who killed her husband, promptly takes her revenge by stabbing him to death.

The opera gets off to a slow start, a long orchestral introduction enclosing a sung narration. This is wholly redundant, but it is so vividly declaimed by Teitgen that you can't help but pay attention. And declamation is perhaps the watchword of the whole work. Saint-Saëns is as punctilious in his word-setting as Massenet; the trouble is, on the evidence here, that he lacked Massenet's theatrical instinct. There are several fine passages, though, especially the duet for Marcomir and Floria - sung with delicacy by Montvidas and Hunold and the funeral procession for Livie's husband. Campellone conducts splendidly and the sound is admirable. Richard Lawrence

# Arabella Renée Fleming sop ........Arabella Hanna-Elisabeth Müller sop ......Zdenka Thomas Hampson bar .....Mandryka Albert Dohmen bass-bar ......Count Waldner Gabriela Beňačková sop .....Adelaide

Saxon State Opera Chorus, Dresden; Dresden Staatskapelle / Christian Thielemann

Stage director Florentine Klepper

Daniel Behle ten.....

Video director Brian Large

**R Strauss** 

C Major Entertainment 🖲 ② 🙅 717208;

© > 717304 (178' • NTSC • 16:9 • DTS-HD MA5.1,

DTS5.1 & PCM stereo • O • s)

Recorded live at the Grosses Festspielhaus, Salzburg, April 10-21, 2014



When this 2014 Salzburg Easter Festival production of Strauss and



Renée Fleming and Thomas Hampson star in Florentine Klepper's production of Strauss's Arabella in Dresden

Hofmannsthal's final opera transferred to Dresden, Renée Fleming was replaced by Anja Harteros. Is it unkind to wish that the German soprano – underrepresented on disc – hadn't headed the cast in the first place?

We already have Fleming's Arabella on film, and that 2008 Decca DVD from Zurich, though let down by its Mandryka, shows her to better advantage. Here she does a respectable job but there's no disguising the fact that the voice has lost much of its creaminess, often thinning out where it should soar. As an actress she's conscientious but rarely compelling – the character comes across as more a quizzical Marschallin than an idealistic debutante. Her German vowels, meanwhile, have developed a tendency to turn sour, giving an unwelcome impression of shrewishness.

Thomas Hampson, as her Mandryka, is similarly solid but offers silver-fox suavity rather than rugged honesty and virile strength, and the voice sounds dry and undernourished. This was the first time Fleming and Hampson had sung these roles opposite one another but, at this stage in their careers, neither is truly convincing.

At least with the Staatskapelle Dresden under Christian Thielemann, Strauss's score (given complete, in its original threeact form) is heard in its best light, with the orchestra's contribution leading up to the final reconciliation especially beautiful. There's fine work from the rest of the cast, too, particularly Hanna-Elisabeth Müller's convincingly boyish Zdenka and Daniel Behle's ardent, strongly sung Matteo. Benjamin Bruns, Derek Welton and Steven Humes are excellent as the three Counts. Daniela Fally's Fiakermilli, though, is more than usually shrill and uningratiating.

Florentine Klepper's production is a strange affair. It starts off traditionally (albeit updated from the specified 1860s to the eve of the First World War) but veers unexpectedly but timidly into the abstract for Act 2, with the addition of masked men in evening dress, who, along with that act's set, hang around for most of Act 3. I wasn't sure about Klepper's take on the final reconciliation, either, in which Arabella's forgiveness is portrayed as a last-minute change of heart. Hugo Shirley

Selected comparison:

Welser-Möst (A/08) (DECC) 🕿 074 3263DH

### Veracini

G

Adriano in Siria	
Sonia Prina contr	Adriano
Ann Hallenberg <i>mez</i>	Farnaspe
Roberta Invernizzi sop	Emirena

Romina Basso mez	Sabina
Lucia Cirillo mez	Idalma
Ugo Guagliardo bass	Osroa
Europa Galante / Fabio Biondi	

Fra Bernardo (M) (3) FB1409491 (172' • DDD • S) Recorded live at the Konzerthaus, Vienna



Madcap Florentine violinist Francesco Maria Veracini (1690-1768) composed Adriano in Siria (1735)

for London's Opera of the Nobility. The cast included Senesino (title-role), Cuzzoni (Emirena), Bertolli (Sabina) and Montagnana (Osroa) and the role of Farnaspe was sung by the recent recruit Farinelli. Metastasio's libretto was adapted extensively by Angelo Maria Corri but the synopsis provided by Fra Bernardo only gets the reader so far. No libretto is included, so listeners with academic internet capabilities might wish to download the original 1735 wordbook. Holger Schmitt-Hallenberg's booklet essay, albeit fascinating, contains a lot of factual errors and casual misrepresentations.

Lord Hervey moaned that *Adriano* was 'the longest and dullest Opera...ever

gramophone.co.uk GRAMOPHONE FEBRUARY 2015 93

inflicted on the ignorance of an English audience' but my own research has led me to suspect Veracini's music deserves a chance to be heard. An obstacle to this was the lack of recitatives in the surviving manuscript sources but Fabio Biondi has constructed them editorially from a later setting by Ferrandini (Munich, 1738). This live Vienna Konzerthaus recording crackles along with theatrical conviction; Europa Galante obviously relish strongly contrasted sequences of arias that are rich in virtuoso detail and pack plenty of theatrical punch.

The vengeance-obsessed Osroa's fizzy 'Sprezza il furor del vento' is sung powerfully by Ugo Guagliardo, whereas Roberta Invernizzi beguilingly wrings every drop of pathos out of Emira's lament 'Prigioniera abbandonata', and her showstopper 'Un lampo di speranza' uses a concertante violin and hints at the theme from Vivaldi's Spring. Sabina's realisation that Adriano desires another woman ('Numi, se giuste siete') is sung by Romina Basso with subtle nuances that mingle disconsolate heartbreak and hints of fury. Sonia Prina's fruity vibrato is riper than ideal for the lovely melodic vocal lines tailor-made for Senesino in Adriano's softly indecisive 'La ragion gli affetti ascolta'. The scenes concluding Act 2 show Veracini's dramatic capabilities at their best: concertante strings play dissonanceladen harmonies exquisitely in Emirena's melancholic 'Quell'amplesso e quell perdono', horns and drums are unleashed to thrilling effect in Osroa's defiant 'Se mai piagato a morte', and 'Amor dover rispetto' is a colossal tour de force featuring trumpets, occasional concertino violins and extraordinarily difficult coloratura, sung by Hallenberg with aplomb. Farnaspe's final aria 'Son sventurato' is a ravishing example of music designed to display Farinelli's softer lyrical side; whether flashy or tender, Hallenberg's magnificent singing takes no prisoners.

Adriano should not be exaggerated up to a level with Handel's two masterpieces dating from the same year (Ariodante and Alcina), but its vividly characterised arias are appreciable on their own terms and hang together much better has usually been assumed. Snap up Fra Bernardo's limited edition issue while you can. David Vickers

Verdi	DVD S
Il trovatore	
Marina Poplavskaya sop	Leonora
Misha Didyk ten	Manrico
Scott Hendricks bar	Count di Luna
Sylvie Brunet-Grupposo mez	Azucena
Giovanni Furlanetto bass	Ferrando

### Chorus and Symphony Orchestra of La Monnaie, Brussels / Marc Minkowski

Stage director **Dmitri Tcherniakov** 

Video director Andy Sommer

Bel Air Classiques ⑤ ❷❷ BAC108; ⑥ ➡ BAC408 (143' + 15' • NTSC • 16:9 • DTS-HD MA5.1, DD5.1 & PCM stereo • 0 • s)

Bonus: Interview with Dmitri Tcherniakov



Dmitri Tcherniakov has nothing to say about *Il trovatore*, and he says it badly. There is no doubt, after a host of

productions – check at least, in these pages, past reviews of *Wozzeck* (12/12) and *Eugene Onegin* (9/09) or watch the wonderful Aix *Giovanni* (A/13) – that Tcherniakov has terrific talent, imagination and daring in finding unconventional routes to dramatic truth. But here he seems to have taken on board too seriously the frequent rubbishing of this opera's plot. And because, as he explains here in an interview, nothing much happens onstage in *Il trovatore* save discussion about what has happened in the past and might in the future, that is all that he stages for much of the evening.

The characters – but they're in modern dress confusingly, so they look like the 'real' cast - assemble in a large house (a Tcherniakov obsession) at Azucena's bidding and prompting to 'remember' the events of the opera. At first they do this just by singing their parts to each other as if it was an early music rehearsal. It's very boring. As Tcherniakov believes the small roles and the chorus have no proper role in the drama they're banished - the chorus offstage, the bit roles (Ines, Ruiz etc) to being sung in by the soloists. By the start of Act 3 di Luna (or was it in real life Tcherniakov?) is getting bored and starts to try to direct some action as he might have wanted it, which consists mostly of sabotaging other scenes by, for example, kissing Leonora provocatively during 'Ah si, ben mio'. Gradually everyone becomes (kind of, very kind of) 'involved' and some kind of sloppy text-related acting has developed by the time we're in Manrico and Azucena's prison.

Useless to say that Minkowski conducts an interesting performance – slow-ish but with plenty of punch – and that the cast are more than adequate and look good for their roles. All is subsumed into what feels like the naughty classroom cheat's view of the opera. The strong basic dramaturgy that habitually informs this director's work has here been sent mistakenly over the top as the first line of dramatic interest. It isn't.

The Mona Lisa has a moustache on but we've learnt nothing new about her.

Mike Ashman

### 

Chorus and Orchestra of the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden / Antonio Pappano

Stage director Stephen Langridge
Video director Jonathan Haswell
Opus Arte (₱ ② ☎ OA1158D;
(₱ ② ➡ OABD7159D (3h 30' + 25' • NTSC • 16:9 • DTS-HD MA5.1, DTS5.1 & LPCM stereo • 0 • S/s)
Recorded live, December 5, 11 & 18, 2013
Extra features: Interviews with Antonio Pappano and Simon O'Neill



'Who is the grail?'
Parsifal's apparently
naive question receives
an ingeniously literal

answer at the climax of a Communion scene that does not demystify the action of the opera or its history but places it in the determinedly realistic context of a secretive, powerful brotherhood whose motives are unclear but whose presented behaviour is sinister enough to taint the sacred symbols they wield. The hygienic isolation of Amfortas and the purposeful movement of his black-clad knights cast shadows of a contemporary plot such as the Bourne trilogy's Operation Treadstone made alarmingly real by Edward Snowden.

Appropriately enough for a work that's always reaching out towards the divine, the staging's moments of revelation are achieved with light, leaving an effective space for the main actors to make their own drama. René Pape's movement well conveys the Gurnemanz of Act 3 left bewildered and alone, even if his singing never lets slip the mask of confident oratory. Parsifal may be the most diatonically secure opera of Wagner's maturity but it's also his most carefully fragmented, whereas Antonio Pappano supports his singers with a pliant, lyrical flow at generally broad tempi: whether the expression is heavy (for the knights) or exposed (for Kundry), the strings bring a voluptuous bloom to Wagner's plangent harmonies. The result can't be confused with the tautly drawn 'Latin Wagner' of Wieland Wagner's vision, realised by Sawallisch, Böhm and Boulez in their turn.



Hygienic isolation: Gerald Finley (Amfortas) lies flat in Stephen Langridge's 2013 production of Wagner's Parsifal for Covent Garden

Wieland might, however, have approved of how Gerald Finley's Amfortas at once commands the stage while wishing to relinquish it in an immensely convincing portrayal sung without a trace of self-pity.

Where stage and pit are most at variance is Act 2. Reprising his devilish-conjuror turn as Klingsor from other productions, Willard White is vocally drier than before, all comic scorn and no shame in his familiar delivery. Nor is Angela Denoke the smokily sensuous siren that some would desire though there is a magnetically powerful centre to both her singing and acting; lamentation can be heard through every arching phrase of seduction, and if the chemistry with Simon O'Neill's Parsifal is somewhat inert, the opera's final tableau reveals why with a simple yet moving suggestion that, still, love is all you need. It is the ringing Heldentenor of O'Neill which most suffers from a sound-mix that privileges pit over stage and gives unwonted prominence to Pappano's sniffing.

For more of the opera's ritual grandeur and austerity, turn to Schulz/Thielemann; but, thanks not least to the work of Finley and lighting designer Alison Chitty, *Parsifal* makes its effect, expressing the peculiarly human longing for absorption into the

beyond like the poetry of Stefan George, if at greater length. Peter Quantrill Selected comparison:

### 'Vienna 1709'

Ariosti Marte placato - Sa il crudel. La placidia - Sinfonia; Tal vicina a Giglio. Le profezie d'Eliseo nell'assedio di Samaria - Prole tenera Baldassare Il giudizio di Paride - Il goder un bel sembiante Bononcini Il fiore delle eroine - Amante ozioso. Il ritorno di Giulio Cesare vincitore della Mauritania - E pur le mie rovine Fux Dafne in Lauro - Lascio d'esser Ninfa. La decima fatica d'Ercole - Sento nel core. Il fonte della salute aperto dalla grazia nel Calvario - So che piace a gli occhi tuoi (Aria di misericordia). Il mese di Marzo consecrato a Marte - Non sdegnar Hana Blažíková sop

Ensemble Tourbillon / Petr Wagner Accent (F) ACC24284 (57' • DDD)



Ten arias by three Italian composers (and the Austrian Fux), all of whom

were active in Vienna during the first decade or so of the 18th century. The title

'Vienna 1709: Opera Arias' is misleading on almost all counts: this broader survey includes music from several serenatas and oratorios dating from 1704-16. Most feature a pair of viols, and not much else except a basso continuo trio.

Sometimes the viols are equal partners in dialogue with the voice, as in the exquisite opener 'Il goder un bel sembiante' from Pietro Baldassari's Il giudizio di Paride (1707), and the paired viols provide an expressive echo of the singer's weeping in 'Prole tenera' from Ariosti's oratorio Le profezie d'Eliseo nell'assedio di Samaria (1705). A few elaborate solo obbligato parts are played by Ensemble Tourbillon's director Petr Wagner, such as the beguilingly spun conversation between virtuoso gamba and limpid voice in 'Sento nel core' from Fux's heroic-pastoral La decima fatica d'Ercole (1710). A pair of oboes is added to a softly seductive sinfonia from Ariosti's Marte placato (1707), and a chalumeau illustrates a pastoral allusion in 'Non sdegnar' from Fux's Il mese di Marzo (1709). Blažíková's limpidly stylish singing eloquently conveys the poetry and its sentiments. Such rarefied beauty and intelligence means that any risk of textural monotony is deftly side-stepped, and a treasure trove of fine music is revealed. David Vickers

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# REPLAY

Rob Cowan's monthly survey of historic reissues and archive recordings

# Character in abundance, spellbinding results

Recordings by some piano and conducting greats from the past gathered into handy collections of various sizes

hen I reviewed Jean-Efflam Bavouzet's exceptional set of the Prokofiev concertos (Chandos, 3/14) I mentioned that, in the massive Second Concerto, 'the brief Scherzo clears the air before the big guns re-emerge feefi-fo-fum style with the Intermezzo, though I would have preferred a broader, more imposing tempo at the outset (ie Vladimir Krainev and Dmitri Kitaenko)'. Well, Melodiya has now obliged with Krainev's strong-arm Moscow Philharmonic cycle (more imposing than its Teldec successor with the Frankfurt Radio Symphony, also under Kitaenko), a set that comes top of the league if visceral impact is your priority. Any sampled concerto should amply back my claim but in the first instance I'd cite Nos 2 and 4 as real joist-shakers.

### 'Krainev's Prokofiev comes top of the league if visceral impact is your priority'

And if you missed (or don't want to shell out on) Warner's 40-CD 'Alfred Cortot Anniversary Edition' which I featured in Replay back in 2013 then The Intense Media has come up with a well-transferred 10-CD collection that amounts to what you might call a Cortot 'starter pack', with the wartime set of Chopin Preludes, the key piano trio and violin sonata recordings (with Thibaud and Casals), Debussy Préludes and Children's Corner, Schumann piano cycles (though no Papillons, shame to say), the Liszt Sonata (its first-ever recording) and so forth. As ever with Cortot, vision and intuition combine with spellbinding musical results.

**Yvonne Lefébure** was a Cortot pupil whose all-too-slender discography is usefully supplemented by a recommendable Testament CD of recital material taped in the early Sixties, including Debussy's *Préludes* Book 2 from 1963. For me though,

aside from some charming Schubert, the highlight is a trio of Fauré pieces, two Nocturnes (Nos 6 & 13) and a Barcarolle (No 6), which represent the perfect balance of head and heart. From Heritage comes 'The Art of Magda Tagliaferro', immensely persuasive playing, not least of Schumann's Faschingsschwank aus Wien, which is second only to Michelangeli's (there's a mere hair's breadth between them), and Reynaldo Hahn's Piano Concerto in E and Sonatine in C.

On the orchestral front, Audite's 'new remastering from original analogue tape' of Beethoven's *Choral* as performed at the Lucerne Festival on August 22, 1954, by the Philharmonia and the Lucerne Festival Chorus under **Wilhelm Furtwängler** (Furtwängler's last Ninth as it happened) has less tonal body than its Tahra predecessor but repeated to-ing and fro-ing between the two transfers suggests that the Audite version is marginally better balanced. As to the performance, sublime isn't the word.

While in his early twenties Jascha Horenstein was Furtwängler's assistant, and if his Beethoven doesn't quite level with his master's best, it can on occasion be mightily impressive. An Eroica recently reissued by Vox is a fair case in point. I recall years ago Deryck Cooke saying to me that in the first movement's coda no one quite managed to negotiate the gathering forces quite as effectively as Horenstein did, and although he was actually referring to an early mono recording with the Pro Musica Orchestra, this stereo remake with the South West German Radio Symphony Orchestra Baden-Baden is virtually as good. The coupling, Haydn's Clock Symphony with the Pro Musica, is less distinctive.

A pity the two-CD set devoted to Horenstein's versions of Beethoven's Fifth and Sixth Symphonies and various overtures is marred by a couple of fairly prominent faults. In the first movement of the Fifth, just as the development gets going (2'56"), there's a tape blip and a moment's worth of missing music; and the *Prometheus* Overture's opening two chords are shorn off. What makes this doubly frustrating is that the performances of the overtures *The Consecration of the House, Leonore* No 3, *Egmont* and *Coriolan* are all superb, the last two especially. The sound quality is basically acceptable. **G** 

### THE RECORDINGS



Prokofiev Pf Concs Krainev
Melodiya (18) (2) MELCD100 2227



Various Cpsrs Pf Wks Cortot The Intense Media (§) (0) 600175



Fauré. Debussy. Ravel. Schubert Pf Wks Lefébure Testament (© SBT1497



**Various Cpsrs** Art of Magda Tagliaferro Heritage ® HTGCD277



**Beethoven** Sym No 9 **Furtwängler** Audite **(M)** AUDITE95 641



**Beethoven** Sym No 3 **Haydn** Sym No 101 **Horenstein** Vox Legends ® VOX7807



**Beethoven** Syms Nos 5 & 6. Ovs **Horenstein** Vox Legends **(B) (2)** VOX7808

96 GRAMOPHONE FEBRUARY 2015 gramophone.co.uk



'Visceral impact': Vladimir Krainev gives 'joist-shaking' performances of Prokofiev's Second and Fourth Concertos

### Reiner conducts Bach

Of the various extant mono 'pre-periodinstrument' sets of Bach Brandenburgs and Orchestral Suites, Fritz Reiner's with, respectively, a 'Chamber Group' (1949, Columbia) and the RCA Victor Orchestra (1952, Victor) is surely the most dynamic. The first thing to say is that Reiner treats each piece as a separate entity, which means that, unlike other interpreters of the same era, you can never quite predict how he's going to tackle any particular movement. He indulges various types of articulation, too, sometimes energetically punching out shorter notes, at other times drawing an expressive *legato*. Take the Third Suite. The celebrated Air, which is beautifully played, runs to over six minutes (with repeats), whereas the closing two movements are exceptionally swift. Likewise in the Third Brandenburg where the first movement is leisurely and the second, performed with a biting staccato, is again very quick - and exciting. The Second Suite is mostly slow whereas the Fourth, with its marmoreal Ouverture, ends with a thrilling, top-gear Réjouissance. As to the soloists, both sets include some of New York's finest, including Julius Baker (flute), William Vacchiano (trumpet), Felix Eyle (violin), William Lincer (viola) and harpsichordist Sylvia Marlowe. Very good transfers from Pristine Audio and I'd commend this set as far more than a mere historic curio. It has genuine musical value, roughly comparable I'd say with the pre-war Adolf Busch set (EMI).

### THE RECORDING



**Bach** Brandenburg Concs. Orch Stes **Reiner** Pristine Audio § 3 PASC425

## Remembering Shumsky

Doremi's recent three-CD collection devoted to the art of violinist Oscar Shumsky showcases a superb player with a rich tone, stylistically poised somewhere between Heifetz and Kreisler, the former most obviously in Wieniawski's Op 4 Polonaise (with Earl Wild), the latter in Kreisler's own achingly nostalgic Viennese Rhapsodic Fantasietta and, even more so, in a sequence of Rachmaninov songs where the combination of Shumsky's quasi-Kreislerian playing style and tenor James Melton singing 'in the manner of John McCormack' is at times uncannily like the real thing. Beethoven's C minor Sonata, Op 30 No 2, with the wonderful Nadia Reisenberg, is too poorly recorded to enjoy wholeheartedly but four vocal gems call for special comment: an aria from Bach's Cantata No 120 with Lois Marshall, an aria from No 132 and Buxtehude's Fubilate Domino with Maureen Forrester, and Mozart's 'L'amerò, sarò costante' (Il re pastore) with Erna Berger. Other highlights include the Tartini-Kreisler Devil's Trill Sonata, Hindemith's Sonata in D, Op 11 No 2, and a full recital given in Basle in 1982 (the year of Shumsky's famous London recital), by which time the full lustre of that rich sound had thinned just a little, though Shumsky's musicality was still very much in evidence.

On the programme: Bach's Second Partita and Strauss's Sonata, with shorter works by Schubert and Kreisler. Shumsky wasn't a true original in the way that, say, Kreisler, Heifetz, Oistrakh, Elman, Huberman or Příhoda were. Rather, his was an unfailingly safe pair of hands that you could rely on to deliver the musical goods with warmth, understanding and panache. And in saying that, I don't mean to damn him with faint praise. Quite the opposite, in fact.

#### THE RECORDING



# Various Cpsrs Legendary Treasures Shumsky Doremi (M) (3) DHR8031/3

### Great cello-playing Dane

The Danish cellist Erling Blöndal Bengtsson died as recently as June 6, 2013, and although his surviving commercial discography is relatively slender, Danacord has accessed numerous broadcast tapes featuring important repertoire that Bengtsson never took into the studio. However, the latest release is made up of first-rate transfers from issued recordings that show this superb cellist in absolute prime technical condition. I would challenge any sensitive listener to cite playing that more resembles the ravishing tonal warmth of Emanuel Feuermann than Bengtsson's 1961 (stereo) recording of a Vivaldi concerto credited as being 'for cello and strings in E minor', or the agility of the way he tackles Boccherini's A major Sonata (famously recorded by Casals). A combination of fire and poetry informs Bengtsson's recordings of the two Brahms cello sonatas with pianists Victor Schi
øler and Herman D Koppel, the Second in particular (1954) sounding more than ever like the Eroica of cello sonatas (Casals and Horszowski on Warner/EMI and Maurice Gendron and Jean Françaix on Melo Classic come closest in that respect). Bengtsson's Beethoven is poised and, like his Brahms, intelligently shaped, and there are works by Stravinsky and Herman D Koppel. A handful of 'encores' are nice to have but, unexpectedly, less characterful and tonally alluring than the principal works. The set is worth having for the Vivaldi, Boccherini and Brahms, all of which are truly wonderful.

### THE RECORDING



Various Cpsrs Gramophone Tribute Bengtsson Danacord (M) (2) DACOCD738

# Books



# Jeremy Nicholas reviews a thorough Dyson biography:

We shall not require a second study of George Dyson – and this one is built to last, beautifully bound and printed'

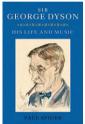


# Peter Quantrill on a volume considering opera since Wagner:

Berry makes a compelling, revisionist assessment of Capriccio as a work unconsciously more radical than its creator'

### Sir George Dyson

His Life and Music By Paul Spicer Boydell Press, HB, 480pp, £45 ISBN 978-1-84383-903-3



'My repute is that of a good technician, happy with words, but not markedly original. I am familiar with modern

idioms, but they are outside the vocabulary of what I want to say. I am really what the 18th century called a Kapellmeister, an untranslatable word which means a musician equipped both to compose and produce such music as is needed in his position or environment.' This was Sir George Dyson's own self-deprecating view of himself in Fiddling While Rome Burns: A Musician's Apology (OUP: 1954), part autobiography but more a collection of essays on the world of music. His assessment is not far wide of the mark – and typically clear-eyed. Dyson's music, for all its virtues, has never captured the attention of conductors and other musicians, nor fired public enthusiasm, in the same way as has the music of his teachers Stanford and Parry, or his near contemporaries Bax, Scott and Ireland, let alone Vaughan Williams. In the estimation of Percy M Young, Dyson was at his best 'with the conventional native forces of chorus and orchestra...and, a good, robust craftsman, [was] content with what may be termed the Three Choirs Festival Style.'

Most readers will be as unfamiliar with Dyson's life as they are with his music. Born into a working-class family in Halifax, Yorkshire, in 1883, he studied at the RCM and spent four years from 1904 in Italy and Germany on a Mendelssohn Scholarship. From 1908 to 1937 he was head of music at a succession of English public schools (Marlborough, Rugby, Wellington and Winchester), leaving the first abruptly after, it seems, an *affair de coeur*. He is

certainly the only composer to have written a definitive guide to grenade fighting. His *Grenade Warfare* sold hundreds of thousands of copies when it was published in 1915. Dyson became director of the RCM in 1938, a post he held until 1952, modernising and greatly enhancing the reputation of the establishment even if, as one of its alumni Joseph Horovitz reveals, many of the students were unaware that their feared (or friendly – opinion was divided) Principal was also a composer. He died exactly 50 years ago.

It does seem extraordinary that such powerful and accomplished works as The Canterbury Pilgrims and Quo vadis? are so little known. Equally strange is the fact (as can be gleaned from the outstanding appendices of this book) that only six works from Dyson's extensive output were recorded during his lifetime: three songs, his brief contributions to the 1937 and 1953 coronations and the Trio of the RAF March (a work almost always credited to Walford Davies alone). There were, however, two volumes of Columbia's International Education Society issued in 1929 in which Dyson himself is the speaker and heard playing Dowland, Farnaby and Bull on the piano and harpsichord.

So Paul Spicer's goal of reclaiming Dyson as 'the towering figure he undoubtedly was in his time' presents a challenge. Though a great deal of the music has now been recorded, little of it is regularly performed; history has a way of deciding for itself who is a major composer, who an interesting minor composer and so forth. No amount of eloquent advocacy will lead to an upgrade. However, if the wordage and physical weight of a biography were any indication of its subject's place in the pantheon then Dyson, judged by this volume, is a Beethoven or Wagner. Spicer has had full access to the Dyson family archive and trawled far and wide in his mission to leave no stone unturned - and, indeed, not a few pebbles.

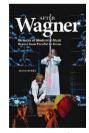
It is a remarkable effort of research and scholarship enhanced by the author being a distinguished composer and choral conductor in his own right (he is a composition student of Herbert Howells): not surprisingly, he is particularly good on every aspect of Dyson's music (wellillustrated here). But in its sometimes obsessive detail, one often loses the trail of the narrative. Do we really need a history of the now-demolished Rhodes Street Methodist Church where Dyson first played the organ or a chronology of the construction of Marlborough College's various buildings? On the other hand, Spicer faces up to the less attractive side of Dyson, such as his decimation of the RCM's valuable library and instrument collection, and his less than savoury attitude to German Jewish refugee musicians.

We shall not require a second study of Dyson – and this one is built to last, printed on high-grade paper, beautifully bound and printed. In the entire extensive text I spotted just one typo: on page xii Dyson's predecessor at the RCM is named as Sir High Allen. Jeremy Nicholas

### **After Wagner**

By Mark Berry

Boydell Press, HB, 325pp, £55 ISBN 978-1-84383-968-2



Examining in turn, in context and in performance *Parsifal*, *Moses und Aron*, *Capriccio* and stage works of Henze, Dallapiccola and

Nono, Mark Berry renews the force of an argument that should no longer need making but is still widely ignored, that 'aesthetic necessity is political necessity... there can no more be "absolute" music than "absolute" politics'. This argument runs in chronological parallel to Stefan Herheim's production of Wagner's last opera, to which he devotes a lengthy and perceptive commentary. Just as Herheim's *Parsifal* travels through the history of the opera from long-gestated conception to politically messy, hygienically cleansed



A self-deprecating 'Kapellmeister': Sir George Dyson conducting In Honour of the City in 1958

afterbirth in post-war Bayreuth, so the narrative alights on operatic points of departure from Wagner's legacy, even or especially where those composers have viewed that legacy with suspicion. To some a toad in the path of progress, to others an intimidating dragon of inexhaustible riches, Wagner's bequest is summed up by Henze in his memoirs: resisting with the selfprotecting impulse of a creative mind what he regards as 'silly and self-regarding emotionalism', he nonetheless concedes, 'as any fool can tell you, it is a summation of all Romantic experience, introducing new ideas, new perspectives and new proportions'.

Berry reading Herheim reading Wagner would have gained much from the rich illustration that illuminates *Modernism after Wagner* by Juliet Koss; and (under doubtless compelling commercial imperatives), by leaving out photographs, his publishers have reduced both the force and the appeal of his narrative, particularly when he comes to consider *Intolleranza 1960* and *Al gran sole carico d'amore*, where the story is in the show. That Nono rated *Lulu* and *Die glückliche Hand* as the greatest operas of the 20th century may tell us more about his attitude to women than to dramatic composition. Berry doesn't explore his

reasoning, though he does note that Nono declared Wagner his greatest influence: another avenue glimpsed in passing.

Dealing with Wagner's legacy of stagecraft – what makes music dramas dramatic – is less the business of this book than outlining the philosophic ideas with which he and his successors wrestled. The risk is not always avoided (and Schoenberg was his own worst enemy in this regard) of reducing his chosen works to a problematic mix of manifesto and staged string quartet, in which characters are analysed as symbols and signifiers, rarely as personalities with their own stories to tell.

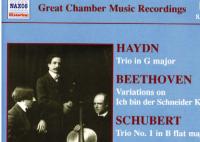
The argument for a reassertion of Christian grace in the action and reception of Parsifal is unfashionable but no less persuasive for that. More curious, in a book celebrating the values of modernism, is the reliance on a Schopenhauerian dichotomy between 'the work itself' and its more or less imperfect realisation. Berry may be right to postulate Monsalvat as an equivalent of Valhalla and the Gibichung Hall, more in need of salvation than a source of it, but Parsifal's transformative act, following the conclusion of The Ring, may not so much 'rejuvenate' the community of knights as destroy it, what's left of it anyway, or at least render it

redundant and irrelevant. 'Open the shrine' are Parsifal's last words: to whom? To all. Nothing can be the same again.

Stymied by lack of live productions to evaluate, Berry devotes a frustrating chapter to Henze's almost-forgotten piece of music theatre Der langwierige Weg in die Wohnung der Natascha Ungeheuer ('The Tedious Way to Natascha Ungeheuer's Apartment'), in which the 'Paths to (and from)' of the chapter title journey through the composer's political awakening but rest only for a couple of pages on Ms Ungeheuer and her rantings, which are certainly worthy of reappraisal. Perhaps animated by greater enthusiasm and familiarity, he makes a compelling, revisionist assessment of Capriccio as a work unconsciously more radical than its creator, inevitably reflecting the horrors of Nazism even as Strauss made every attempt to seal himself off from them. More consideration of the composer's pervasive, determined atheism would have reinforced the sense of his modernity, and in a book where the shades of Hegel and Marx loom large, a bolder alliance of aesthetic modernism with left-wing ideology would clarify Berry's own stance. Still, we have his Twitter feed for that: @boulezian, naturally.

Peter Quantrill

# Classics RECONSIDERE



Jacques Thibaud, Violin Pablo Casals, Cello

Alfred Cortot, Piano



Rob Cowan and Tully Potter share their enthusiasm for one of the classic chamber music recordings - Schubert's B flat Trio from Thibaud, Casals and Cortot



### Schubert

Piano Trio No 1 in B flat, D898 Jacques Thibaud vn Pablo Casals vc Alfred Cortot pf EMI mono ® 4 978003-2; Naxos mono (Originally released as HMV DB947/50, 10/26. Recorded in Kingsway Hall, London, on July 5 & 6, 1926)

When the astronomer perceives through his telescope a triple star he knows that he is looking at a supreme example of celestial harmony. The musician, on the other hand, when he sees three musical luminaries shining close together, confidently predicts

a cataclysm; for the musical star seldom resembles the heavenly one in anything but brightness. It is therefore peculiarly gratifying to find three first-magnitude stars such as Thibaud, Casals and Cortot combining for chamber music with all the orderliness of a sidereal system. I heard them play this trio about a year ago, and it was Schubert that mattered to each of them, not Thibaud, nor Cortot, nor Casals, and the result was a performance I shall never forget.

The rendering I have just listened to on these four records was substantially

the same. I think they take the slow movement a shade faster in order to get it in on a couple of sides, and there may be other differences in detail; but on the whole I believe that the interpretation they give on the records is the interpretation they gave at the concert. Casals's playing of the first strain in the slow movement and Thibaud's treatment of the opening tune of the finale are as expressive and as finished as ever, and the details of the ensemble stand out with wonderful clearness.

Peter Latham (10/26)

Rob Cowan Twenty-one years old when this indelibly memorable recording was made, the Thibaud-Casals-Cortot trio was both a melding of minds and a showcase for strong-minded players on a roll. Their pooled resources stoke the fires right from the off: Alfred Cortot both balletic and imperious, Jacques Thibaud sporting that unmistakably bittersweet tone (rather like Kreisler with a splash of citrus), and Pablo Casals voicing every phrase with eloquence, his sound pure mahogany, his decisive bowing and variegated vibrato compounding the magic. One 'vintage' cellist in particular springs to mind as a rival, and that's Casals's younger contemporary Emanuel Feuerman, who also recorded the B flat, many years later, with Jascha Heifetz and Arthur Rubinstein, a famous set involving three wonderful musicians which, for all its passing beauties (and there are plenty of those), could well serve as the ultimate example of the triple-tier power struggle such a line-up might imply. Here, though, the sense of animated conversation sets in even within the first minute, with excited exchanges between violin and cello from 0'22", a propensity for singing, not only

from Thibaud and Casals, but from Cortot, too. And then at 1'40", the magic really begins when, at the foot of a diminuendo scale from Cortot, Casals enters with the lovely second subject, his approach approximating, in its fragile beauty, the tender vocalising of a great Schubert Lieder singer.

Tully Potter Rob, from our 21st-century standpoint it seems no surprise that the B flat Trio captivated gramophone listeners from the outset. But that it was recorded at all was a miracle. It all boils down to the nature of the work itself. Strangely, this sunny piece was not published until 1836, eight years after Schubert's death and nine years after its companion in E flat. Robert Schumann wrote of the newly issued B flat: 'A glance at Schubert's trio, and all human commotion vanishes, and the world shines in new splendour.' Thanks in large part to the 1926 discs, the B flat Trio became one of those works, like the Trout Quintet, which fed the vision of Schubert as a happy-go-lucky Biedermeier figure scribbling songs on scraps of paper. HMV did not get round to the E flat Trio until 1935 - when the Busch Trio did a fine job

- and it has taken us almost until the present day to appreciate the tragic, angry dimension of Schubert. As you know, in 1926, electric recording was only a year old. Virtually no Schubert, or chamber music of any kind, was in the catalogues. In asking Cortot, Thibaud and Casals to record Schubert and Beethoven, Fred Gaisberg had an eye to the approaching centenaries in 1927 and 1928. In the event, he was partially frustrated, because Beethoven's Kakadu Variations remained unpublished at the time; but the Schubert triumphed. Five out of the eight sides in the 78rpm set were first takes, just one factor that made it so special. No wonder American Columbia got Myra Hess into a studio at the end of 1927 to record a competing version with Jelly d'Arányi and Felix Salmond.

**RC** I wonder if fortunes had been reversed and it had fallen to the Busch-Serkin Trio to record the B flat while Thibaud, Cortot and Casals had been offered the more tragic E flat, what might have been bequeathed to us? I think the two pianists would have set the overall tone. Rudolf Serkin's probing intellect especially suited the E flat

100 GRAMOPHONE FEBRUARY 2015 gramophone.co.uk



Pablo Casals, Jacques Thibaud and Alfred Cortot - 'three first-magnitude stars' combine for this glorious Trio

whereas Cortot's Gallic joie de vivre brings both charm and ebullience to the B flat. Would Serkin have been so blithely lyrical in the First Trio or Cortot taken us quite so far along the Winterreise route in the Second? Idle speculation of course: but it would have provided an interesting contrast with what we already have and treasure. But moving on to the wonderful Andante un poco mosso second movement, in those opening bars I'd always treasured Feuerman's recording - still do; but listening again to Casals, where the movement of the bow is indiscernible either way, the tonal impression so touchingly vulnerable. . . there's nothing quite like it. And the tearful duetting with Thibaud a little later on – straight from the heart, whereas in the lighter middle section, at the point where the veil gently falls and Schubert begins to question himself (around 3'51") – oh, perhaps I'm wrong, maybe this group could have been as effective in the E flat.

**TP** Your mention of joie de vivre, Rob, brings me to the essence of what makes this Thibaud-Casals-Cortot recording special. It is the sheer joy. The opening of the work is given a surge of irresistible exuberance. In my experience, only the Suk Trio has come near the joyfulness of Thibaud-Casals-Cortot, and as the Czechs managed it for both Supraphon and Denon, it confirms my feeling that you need an exalted state of grace for this piece. Cortot's beautiful scales, Casals's breathtaking introduction of the second subject, which Thibaud only intensifies, and the way the three men manage to relax without ever losing the thread, these are special. In the development the string players are totally in accord with each other and with Cortot, whose unique grandeur in places reminds us that the work was published as a Grand Trio. The whole

thing has a freshness which is carried forward into the Andante. Cortot sets the barcarolle-like atmosphere and Casals's tone is like a shower of gold, the portamento knitting the phrases. This is one of the few works of which we have two Casals recordings, and post-war he modified his portamento, mindful of changes in fashion. I prefer the 1926 Casals! Thibaud's reply to Casals is ethereal, the string players' tones carried on the breath like Caruso's mezza voce. The more agitated central section brings Cortot further to the fore but the exchanges are still conversational. At the reprise, Thibaud is first with the barcarolle theme, and as the movement draws towards its close, violin and cello duet on equal terms. HMV moved the Scherzo out of its rightful place in the set, so that people could buy the Andante separately on Sides 5 and 6: even then, it was recognised as a gift from the gods.

**RC** Then there's the catch-me-if-youcan Scherzo, brilliantly managed by this illustrious team, the two string players goading the pianist on before the key shifts and all three fly towards a repeated statement of the opening theme. The one place where I stay absolutely loyal to a major rival is in the Trio, where on the Heifetz-Feuerman-Rubinstein Victor version, Heifetz glides blithely in and around the principal theme, his tone as silken and intensely expressive as ever it was. At one point, Thibaud turns queasily sharp - not a major problem in the wider scheme of things, but a passing distraction. The finale opens with plenty of bounce, the gaily swinging second subject also given with a real lift. Cortot here offers a suggestion of the grandeur he brought to the first movement, a canny balancing act (I also love the way he jabs a supportive staccato at 3'32"), with Casals singing his

heart out for the movement's development section. It's play all the way from there until the end, though Schubert's sleight of hand never kids us into thinking that the light-heartedness is achieved at a bargain premium. It isn't. This is ingenious dialogue with an argumentative edge, and these fêted virtuosos won't allow you to forget that woven in among the laughter and magic is real gravitas. Such is their artistry, and it has been a real joy meeting up with the three of them again. It made me want to revisit their Haydn Op 73 No 2 and Beethoven Archduke - though, to be truthful, when it comes to thinking about those particular performances, there, as here, my memory never plays tricks.

**TP** Heifetz means 'jewel', and he is always 'brilliant cut', whereas I prefer the softer glow of a Thibaud, despite his occasional lapses. With the Scherzo, we hit one of the snags of 78rpm recording - the omission of repeats to keep the number of discs in a set to a minimum. All repeats are excised, so that we hear about half as much of this movement as on a modern version. But what we have is Elysian. A Scherzo Elysian? Well, Cortot is so rhythmically precise and all three are so deliciously in accord, with lovely tone from the pianist, that the effect is as light as Champagne. The tempo for the lullaby-like Trio feels just right to me, and the Scherzo reprise maintains the rhythmic delicacy.

And so to the finale, with Cortot and Thibaud setting a relaxed tempo. The little outbursts do not upset the thoroughly agreeable progress: as episode follows episode, the three keep an acrobatic balance between vertical poise and forward motion. Tempo changes are organic and the players seem to be making it all up as they go. The teasing tension is held until the final emphatic chords. It is a real performance.

A word about sound quality: despite the presence of three 'recording experts', the sound always had more distortion than was ideal – and in the Beethoven variations that were held back, it was really quite poor, even for those experimental times. But the Kingsway Hall acoustic wraps round the players nicely and the recording separates them so that you can always hear who is doing what. It seems that even in the presence of titans, perfection is always just out of reach. But is that not the human condition? Several modern transfers have brought Cortot, Thibaud and Casals before us with very creditable results. And musically, Gramophone readers cannot do better, it seems to me. We are indeed all beneficiaries of a kind of artistry that rarely visits this vexed world of ours. **6** 

# THE SPECIALIST'S GUIDE TO...

# 20th-century harpsichord music

**James Jolly** selects 10 pieces written in the last century for an instrument that had languished seemingly unloved for more than 100 years, but which, thanks to its unusual sonorities, has enjoyed a renaissance

hen the fortepiano emerged in the second half of the 18th century, it seemed to sound the death knell for the harpsichord. As the new instrument grew in size and sound (as the pianoforte), you might have been forgiven for thinking that the last notes had ever been composed for the harpsichord. But come the 20th century, and the older instrument started to enjoy a revival, not just as the right tool for playing music of the Baroque, but also as an intriguing purveyor of unusual sonorities.

A new generation of charismatic (and no doubt highly persuasive) players

inspired this resurgence of interest. The redoubtable Wanda Landowska drew new compositions from Poulenc and Falla (albeit for her Pleyel harpsichords, which with their sturdy frames rather more closely resembled iron-framed bedsteads than winsome musical instruments), and, later on, players such as Antoinette Vischer and Elisabeth Chojnacka were assiduous in commissioning new works from leading modern composers.

It was perhaps the harpsichord's very focused sound and its ability to cut through often quite complex textures that made it an instrument worth exploring for modern sound worlds (and, of course, there was a vogue in the 1960s for the use of the harpsichord in theme tunes for TV series such as *Danger Man* and *The Avengers* – where it fitted the Swinging Sixties vibe with extraordinary ease and effectiveness!). Unlike the piano, the harpsichord's resurgence in the 20th century perhaps gave it a novelty that transformed an actually quite old instrument into something with a radically new character. No wonder composers of real personality (for instance Ligeti, Ohana, Xenakis and Louis Andriessen) have been drawn to it. **6** 



A modern master: Gramophone Award-winning harpsichordist Mahan Esfahani has recorded Ligeti's Continuum for Wigmore Hall Live



🛈 Falla

Concerto for harpsichord, flute, oboe, clarinet, violin and cello (1926)

John Constable hpd

London Sinfonietta / Simon Rattle Decca (\$) (2) 466 1282 (5/81<sup>R</sup>)

Falla writes in a spiky, neo-classical language here - not unlike Poulenc in Concert champêtre (both pieces were written for Landowska). The work consciously looks back to earlier ages, particularly the Baroque, and manages a transparency of sound that works well with the 'modern' instruments of the ensemble. This is a major staging post in the harpsichord's revival.



Leigh

Concertino (1936) Trevor Pinnock hpd LPO / Nicholas Braithwaite Lvrita (F) SRCD289 (8/85<sup>R</sup>)

The Concertino by the short-lived Walter Leigh (1905-42) - a master craftsman of lighter fare - taps into a similar musical language as does Warlock's Capriol Suite. The juxtaposition of harpsichord and modern orchestra makes for some interesting perspectives, especially in the central movement, where, with the harpsichord's inability to sustain, two worlds come together in an elegant fusion that neatly avoids pastiche. Pinnock gives a delightful performance.



<sup>1</sup> Martinů

Harpsichord Concerto (1935) Zuzana Růžičková hpd Czech Philharmonic CO / Václav Neumann

Supraphon (F) SU36222

Ever adaptable to new sonorities (or new 'old' sonorities), Martinů wrote quite a lot of music for the harpsichord (including a wonderfully imaginative sonata). The concerto is couched in a neo-classical language (think Stravinsky's Dumbarton Oaks with a jangling continuo!) which bursts into life with colossal energy in the last movement. Martinu's unmistakable musical signature is there in every bar.



# 🔹 🕖 Martin

Petite symphonie concertante (1945)

Christiane Jaccottet hpd et al Suisse Romande Orchestra /

**Armin Jordan** Apex **(B)** 0927 48687-2 (11/91<sup>R)</sup> The title hints at neo-classicism, but Martin's sound world, while still tonal (though using a kind of 12-tone system), draws on a much more modern palette. The work has much in common with, say, Bartók's Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta in its creation of atmosphere, but has the rhythmic vitality of other neo-classical creations. The harpsichord creates fascinating textures when heard alongside the other soloists - harp and piano.



# 6 Ohana

Carillons (1960) Elisabeth Chojnacka hpd Timpani (F) 1C1161

With this 1960 piece, the

harpsichord has shaken off pretty well everything that links it, in sound terms, to its 18th-century incarnation. Here the composer uses smudges of sound to represent the bells of the title, and by using the full range of the instrument (often simultaneously) Ohana creates a remarkable richness of sound. This is a very modern use of the harpsichord, one that emphasises its percussive qualities as well as - crucially - its ability to create a sense of perspective.



# Carter

Concerto for harpsichord, piano and two chamber orchestras (1961)

Gilbert Kalish of

Paul Jacobs hpd Contemporary Chamber Ensemble / Arthur Weisberg

Nonesuch (B) (4) 7559 79922-1 (7/09)

When this piece was premiered in 1961, Stravinsky described it as 'a masterpiece, by an American composer'. Elliott Carter opposes each of his two - unusually paired - keyboard instruments with its own chamber orchestra. There is a surprising delicacy here, and the piece evolves with a fluidity that reinvents the concept of theme and variations.



4 Ligeti Continuum (1968) Mahan Esfahani hpd Wigmore Hall Live M WHLIVE0066 (6/14)

'A harpsichord has an easy touch,' wrote Ligeti. 'It can be played very fast, almost fast enough to reach the level of continuum, but not quite... As the string is plucked by the plectrum, apart from the tone you also hear quite a loud noise.' And Continuum explores, with mesmerising allure, what happens when you play very fast - whole new dimensions of sound are created and the piece shimmers with light. This truly is the shock of the old!



# 📵 Xenakis

Khoaï (1976) Elisabeth Chojnacka hpd Apex (\$) (2) 2564 64202-2

Xenakis wrote five works for harpsichord including three that amplify it. This, the earliest, dates from 1976 and, like the others, owes its existence to Elisabeth Chojnacka. Xenakis breaks new ground in performance techniques that give the impression of a musical space slowly filling up with melody - the piece builds to a colossally imposing climax that threatens to demolish the instrument itself. A genuinely groundbreaking work in the harpsichord's modern journey.



# 2 Andriessen

Overture to Orpheus (1982) Barbara Maria Willi hpd Musicaphon M → M51863 It starts out sounding a little like

a harpsichord being tuned, but soon little motifs are set in motion, with each hand on a different manual (in a nod back to the 18th century) - allowing two notes at the same pitch to sound simultaneously. It begins to exercise a magnetic pull that is quite beautiful: simplicity is used here to very sophisticated effect, tensions emerging from the gradual elaboration of the themes. Andriessen suggested we imagine an overture to an opera in which Orpheus plays the leading part.



# Poulenc Concert champêtre (1928)

Pascal Rogé hpd French National Orchestra / Charles Dutoit • Decca © 476 2181 (3/97<sup>R</sup>)

Instantly recognisable as being by Poulenc (what a characteristic musical voice he had), the Concert champêtre draws on the composer's insouciant, carefree temperament. He uses the 'motoric' quality of the harpsichord to provide a vibrant, shimmering foreground against which his woodwinds can scamper and frolic. The orchestra is, untypically for the time, quite large, but is always used with great care for transparency and delicacy. The central sicilienne reaches back in time with grace and elegance before the presto finale brings the composer's cheeky, tongue-in-cheek humour to the fore. This is a real charmer of a work.

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# THE GRAMOPHONE COLLECTION

# 'A supreme example of head and heart ruling in equal measure'

**César Franck's Violin Sonata** is a complex piece, and **Caroline Gill** finds that the numerous recordings fall into two broad camps

here are a number of composers of the French high-Romantic period whose violin sonatas represent some of their greatest artistic achievements: Saint-Saëns, Ravel and Fauré all crystallised their most mature musical ideas into their violin sonatas (many of them writing only a single example). But if one alone of those was not a slow burn, it was the Sonata in A by César Franck. From its first performance (1886) it was lauded and magnified, even though it was given on a borrowed violin and a hotel piano at the wedding of the composer's friend Eugène Ysaÿe.

The 'proper' premiere (also 1886) was hardly less incongruous: also with Ysaÿe, it was given at the Musée Moderne de Peinture in Brussels, in light that was so dim that most of the piece had to be played from memory. Vincent d'Indy, a devoted supporter and pupil of Franck, who chronicled his experiences with him and was present at this performance, described the fading light of the scene: 'The public was requested to leave, but...refused to budge. Ysaÿe was heard to strike his music stand with his bow, exclaiming "get on, get on". And then, unheard-of marvel, the two artists, plunged in gloom in which nothing could be distinguished, performed the last three movements from memory... Music, wondrous and alone, held sovereign sway in the darkness of the night. The miracle will never be forgotten.'

## TWO SCHOOLS OF THOUGHT?

Ravel maintained that there were two schools of musical thought before the wars in France:

those that aligned themselves with Debussy, and those that followed Franck. In a letter of 1906 he referred to this latter group, which he called 'scholistes', as 'morose followers of a form of neo-Christianity', only fairly shortly afterwards singling out Franck himself for particular criticism for treating that 'scholisme' as a form of dry intellectualism that robbed music of any proper feeling. He complained that all the elements of music in Franck's work were elaborated separately and united by nothing other than technical exercise, rather than being the product of a simultaneous and instinctive idea. How wrong could Ravel have been (and later Debussy, who also waded into the argument).

It's difficult not to see the violin sonata as musical poetry of great maturity and depth, written at a time when Franck was still, even into his early sixties, labouring under his deep love for (or, at least, unappeased sexual obsession with) his much younger pupil Augusta Holmès. It cannot be ignored that the majority of his greatest work - late bloomer that he was, despite his father's hopes for the child prodigy he had attempted to bully into being - was written in the final 10 years of his life. Whether that is to do solely with his continuing artistic development is impossible to know, but it is unassailable that his passion for Augusta (beloved of many of his circle, Saint-Saëns included) informed a lot of that later music - the Piano Quintet in particular.

The Quintet is, though, more raw and emotional than the sonata, which has the poise and elegance of a later work, even though it's only slightly later than the Quintet. There is much radiance in this sonata – especially in the ravishing final movement, where all Franck's extraordinary ideas, borne out of a single, tiny motif, come together. It is a paean of such beauty that it is harder to see it as a work borne solely out of human emotion, like the Quintet, than as a joyous equilibrium of emotion and intellectual endeavour.

The complex and minutely wrought structure of the piece is such that - even though the listener isn't constantly made self-consciously aware of it – its ideas are running beneath the surface in a constant metamorphosis, at the same time as driving the music in a way that makes it stand up to even the most repeated of listenings. And that same complexity makes it impossible for the piece's lyricism ever to descend into sentimentality. It is a supreme example of head and heart ruling one piece in equal measure – and performers have been in disagreement since the earliest recordings over which faction to give most credence. Very few find a balance, and it is interesting that some of the best recordings remain some of the earliest still available.

## **DISTINGUISHED EARLY RECORDINGS**

Lola Bobescu and Jacques Genty in 1951 give a performance of force that is nevertheless evenly balanced, with reciprocity that is hard to find elsewhere. Josef Suk and Jan Panenka (1967) are also surprisingly intimate and unmannered, and very appealing as a result. Mischa Elman, recording with Joseph Seiger



at the end of his career in 1955 for Decca, was born in the year after Franck's death and worked well within the lifetimes of composers directly influenced by Franck, thus carrying with his performance a heritage that is unassailable. Seiger is regrettably more of a passenger than is appropriate for this duo sonata, but Elman's beautiful warmth of tone (though

unfortunately not free of tuning issues when he's playing in a very high tessitura) creates an intimacy that means that although the movements feel disjointed in terms of structure and relay, there's nevertheless a strong sense that he is telling a story. There is great artistry in both his playing and his relationship with Seiger, as can also be said of **Itzhak Perlman** and

Vladimir Ashkenazy in 1969 – a recording that, despite a lack of fluidity in the transition between movements and boomy acoustics that don't protect the sound enough, is one of great authority. Elman never descends into self-indulgence, but displays extraordinary subtlety of articulation, phrasing and even *portamento* – which are all varied and draw in

the listener repeatedly. Elman was overshadowed by Heifetz, and his tone and style were unfashionable for much of his life; but the authenticity he applied to his playing is particularly apparent here, and, surprisingly, his tone and style have aged much more gracefully in comparison with Heifetz's.

This has much in common with the 1966 recording of Christian Ferras and Pierre Barbizet, which carries an enormous intensity without any hint of tasteless displays of emotion. There is something dreadfully sad about this recording that brings out a sense of pathos that is constantly hovering on the sidelines of this piece, but is rarely invoked with any success. The combination of the Schubert Ensemble's first violinist Simon Blendis and William Howard in the 2003 recording for Champs Hill creates the same kind of effect, similarly through the ghostly change of tone they adopt when oscillating between statements of musical ideas alternately in the major and minor key (a technique emblematic of Franck's style, and used frequently in this sonata). Both Blendis and Ferras are steadfast in their support of Franck as a melodist of the most unique type, and thereby they keep their phrasing safely on the right side of heavy-handed: the stately manner in which they play is noticeable in how it opens up the power of the piece.

# **FATHOMING FRANCK'S INTENTION**

It can be difficult to tell what Franck was looking for in any of his music. He was a famously gentle soul, so grateful for any public performance of his work that he would silence anyone making criticisms of any sort as 'too harsh'; but that is not

# BEST ARCHIVE RECORDING

# Ferras; Barbizet

Brilliant Classics (\$) (4) 93791

Christian Ferras has a natural tone that suits this work particularly well. It is impassioned, but pure. He also had a direct line back to the in-fighting and



pettiness that ran between Franck and his contemporaries - his father was taught by Marcel Chailley, a devotee of Saint-Saëns.



Eugène Ysaÿe: for whose wedding the sonata was written

to say that he was not entirely committed to the music itself. He was an enormously erudite teacher, known to be dedicated and constructive, but if he felt that a pupil had failed to show adequate intensity of effort he would refuse to mark their work. That, combined with his producing four masterpieces, not only of his own, but also of French music in general (the D minor Symphony, the String Quartet, the Three Chorales for organ and the Violin Sonata), in the final years of his life, suggests that to consider only the 'scholisme' in his music is to miss the point.

Two modern recordings that choose to

# BEST MODERN RECORDING

Capuçon; Buniatishvili Erato © 2564 62501-8 The balance of serenity in the violin with the fieriness of the accompaniment, rather than the usual other way round, works beautifully in this recording. The piece makes perfect sense with this equity, and the fact that Capuçon



and Buniatishvili communicate so effectively with so little obvious wilfulness is testament to their sophistication, both as individual artists and as a duo.

follow the emotional route with varying degrees of success are those of Vadim Repin and Nikolai Lugansky (2010) and Joshua Bell and Jean-Yves Thibaudet (1988). Bell adopts a sound and pose with the piece that is noticeably informed by Ysaÿe, and although there is much sense to be had in that, the fundamental basis of the work is to be found as with the quintet, the quartet, the chorales and the oratorio Les béatitudes – in the music of Beethoven, recreated with supreme imagination by Franck. As a result, the showman position adopted by Bell for the earlier of his two recordings (there is a later one, with Jeremy Denk, made in 2010) is less effective than the almost counter-intuitive introspection of Repin's performance with Lugansky. It remains a particularly emotional performance, but at the same time holds back so much of Repin's natural vibrato that it does not overpower – instead creating an overwhelming performance more by stealth than glaring statement.

The 1977 recording of **Kyung-Wha Chung** and **Radu Lupu**, however, has an extraordinary

fluidity that allows the cyclical ideas of the piece to modify, contort and transform from one to the other with an ease that illustrates with painful beauty the inevitability behind the growth of the musical ideas of the piece. No restatement of a theme is the same, though those tiny shifts are very subtle. There is great fluidity, too, in Lupu's accompaniment, which ebbs and flows with Chung in a perfect reflection, thus creating great climaxes in the phrasing which completely negate the need to overplay or emphasise the point beyond what's already written into the music. In contrast, and disappointingly, the

# RUNNER-UP

**Dumay; Pires** DG **(F)** 445 880-2GH

The glow of Dumay's tone and Pires's extraordinary subtlety of phrasing would have made this recording a worthy winner, if it hadn't been for Collard's comfort in this repertoire. The final movement on this disc,



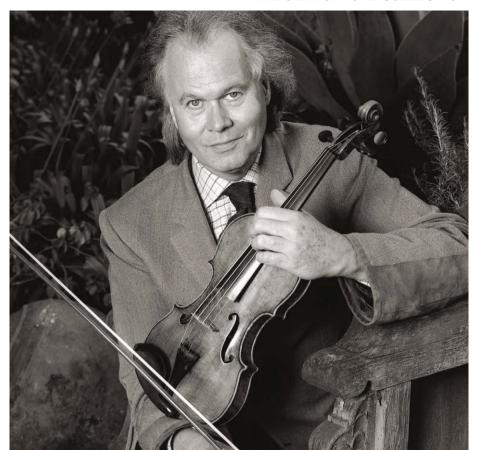
when you arrive at the end of it, provides a feeling of total expansiveness in its simplicity, with all the radiant breadth of a Sibelius symphony. live recording of **Ruggiero Ricci** and **Martha Argerich** at Carnegie Hall in 1979 starts promisingly but is carried away in the heat of the moment(s), with the tuning (and even, occasionally, the notes themselves) going so awry it is difficult to defend its listenability, even within the framework of what is an overall challenging artistic experience.

#### **THE TWO CAMPS**

The balance of this sonata as a piece of intense, Romantic writing on the one hand and carefully wrought polyphony (the canon that forms the final movement is almost as intricate as a Bach fugue) on the other, means that its recordings can fall into two categories: the unintentionally glib, and the overplayed. Performances in the overplayed camp rarely tip over into the magical piece it can be - they largely start out almost matter-of-fact, in a representation of the intellectual side of Franck's character that was so important. Jennifer Pike and Martin Roscoe, recording in 2010, use the most easily overplayed movement, the second (so fiery that you can be fooled into thinking you haven't heard any of its material before), to make this point most clearly. Many performances present the music in this movement with a constant accelerating and decelerating surge that is not justifiable by the score, but Pike's approach is much more deliberate. Rather than making any speed changes at all, she simply changes the articulation, placing an infinitesimal gap between the last two notes of each phrase, which, in turn, propels it into its repeat. It makes her sound considered and modest in a manner that, after many highly emotional performances, is a refreshing relief, particularly in the open-faced simplicity of the vital third movement.

And vital the slow third movement is – as much of the success of any performance hinges on it. It is where the intervals that Franck introduced in the prelude-like first movement, and developed beyond recognition in the heavily disguised scherzo and trio of the second movement, stretch out and blossom. It can range from a breathless staticity to a rippling watery effect to the sinuous bloom of an opening flower. All these approaches can be attractive, but only work if they are presented within a framework of perfect tuning and calm phrasing.

The live recording made at the 1978 Salzburg Festival by **Leonid Kogan** and **Nina Kogan** feels the phrasing and the direction, and plainly understands it, but the actual sense is not there, creating a glibness that is difficult to ignore.



Augustin Dumay: three recordings, including a perfect partnership with Jean-Philippe Collard

The 1985 performance by **Shlomo Mintz** and **Yefim Bronfman**, though, is almost unequalled as an example that propels itself forwards simply by virtue of the notes on the page. There's a warmth of tone all the way through the build-up of this crucial juncture of the piece – where the music starts to come out of the complexity of its development and propel the listener towards the radiance of the final movement.

It also stands in stark contrast to the 1995 recording of **Anne-Sophie Mutter** and **Lambert Orkis**, in which the ravishing central phrase is swooped over with such extreme vibrato that the bow is almost bounced off the string, leaving the sound so undermined that it is impossible to be comforted by it. Mutter even occasionally changes the rhythm slightly on a restatement (although far without the bounds of *rubato*),

# SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

DATE/A	RTISTS	RECORD COMPANY (REVIEW DATE)
1951	Bobescu, Genty	Testament (F) SBT1360
1955	Elman, Seiger	Testament (Ē) (④ SBT4 1344
1966	Ferras, Barbizet An	dromeda 🕲 ② ANDRCD5140; Brilliant Classics 🕲 ④ 93791; DG 🕲 🔞 480 6655 (12/67 <sup>R</sup> )
1967	Suk, Panenka	Supraphon (§) (6) SU4075-2 (11/68 <sup>R</sup> )
1969	Perlman, Ashkenazy	Decca (M) 475 8246DOR (5/69 <sup>R</sup> )
1977	K-W Chung, Lupu	Decca (M) 421 154-2DM (9/80°, 1/89); (E) 460 006-2DM; (S) (20 discs) 478 7611DB20
1978	L & N Kogan	Orfeo (Ē) C657 O51B (2/06)
1979	Ricci, Argerich	Etcetera (Ē) KTC1038 (3/86 <sup>R</sup> , 9/86)
1985	Mintz, Bronfman	Brilliant Classics ® 94160 (9/86°); DG ® ② 477 5448GTA2 (9/86°)
1988	Bell, Thibaudet	Decca (9) (2) 475 6709DF2 (11/89 <sup>R</sup> )
1989	Dumay, Collard	EMI (§) (2) 381783-2 (2/90 <sup>R</sup> )
1995	Dumay, Pires	DG (Ē) 445 880-2GH (10/95)
1995	Mutter, Orkis	DG (Ē) 445 826-2GH (12/96)
2003	Blendis, Howard	Champs Hill (F) CHRCD004 (4/06 <sup>R</sup> )
2010	Pike, Roscoe	Chandos (Ē) CHAN10667 (6/11)
2010	Repin, Lugansky	DG (Ē) 477 8794 (3/11)
2012	Dumay, Lortie	Onyx (P) ONYX4096 (6/13)
2014	R Capuçon, Buniatish	vili Erato (Ē) 2564 62501-8 (11/14)

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Capuçon and Buniatishvili: a partnership that's perfectly balanced

Ferras and Barbizet: intensity without tasteless displays of emotion

super librum, to make her point – in stark contrast to the manner in which, for instance, Chung goes about it, and there is rarely a sense that Orkis, an artist of profound thought, is more than a hitchhiker on Mutter's journey. Not so in the 2014 recording by Renaud Capuçon and Khatia Buniatishvili, which is not so much driven by the assertive accompaniment as held together as a completely credible whole by it. Buniatishvili communicates with Capuçon's calm self-possession as the musical ideas are passed between the two with sensitivity as much as intent to emphasise the role of the accompanist.

# A TRIPLE FROM DUMAY

Augustin Dumay's second phrase of the opening movement isn't as ghostly in his 2012 recording with **Louis Lortie** as it is in his previous two recordings, but he nevertheless brings about a contrast by intensifying its sweetness. In all his recordings, Dumay plays like a classical violinist of the concerto school, and his multiple recordings of this piece are dramatically informed by his accords with the various partners with whom he has worked. In the performance with Lortie it's hard to escape the sense that it is the Dumay Show, and that the slightly combative relationship they have is not what the work needs. The final section of the second movement, on this basis, becomes relentless fairly early on, and the sense of duality that has been lost by that prevails over the rest of the performance. All the tempo changes are driven by the violin, with no sense of mutuality, which is conspicuous and stressful. The second

movement requires the pianist to step up, even if he hasn't previously and doesn't subsequently, and there is no question that Lortie does this admirably – but Dumay doesn't let him get a word in edgeways, and that is frustrating.

Far less frustrating, though, is Augustin Dumay's sublime 1995 recording with Maria-João Pires. Here, there is a far greater sense of reciprocity, and no feeling at all that the players are locked in a competition. It is more a meeting of the minds of two great artists who are at all times engaged on an intellectual as well as emotional level. There is all the beauty of Dumay's tone to be found here (as there is also in the recording with Lortie), but there is less stress and less ruthlessness.

It is, though, in Augustin Dumay's earliest recording, from 1989, with Jean-Philippe **Collard**, that pianist and violinist are pitched with the greatest equality. Although the violin is recorded more closely than the piano, there is never the sense that Dumay is pushing himself too far forwards: there is a constant, knife-edge balance between the two instruments that supports the overall construction of the sonata and never loses track of how a single germinative idea is the expressive basis of the entire musical cycle. Further, though, there are passages of great subtlety that give life to the unusual cadences and Gregorian chant-style modality that perfume Franck's style - something that is missing in so many other recordings.

Until he wrote his Violin Sonata, Franck had lacked pure lyricism in his melodic writing – it had only shown itself a tiny amount, even in the slow movement of the quintet. With the Violin Sonata, though, he finally found a perfect virtuous circle of lyricism, melodic beauty and technical perfection, and created a piece that has enjoyed almost ubiquitous popularity since its first performance. To find a recording that can sit proud of the enormous catalogue of performances of this piece is to find one that can capture its classical serenity without making it waffle or sound pretentious; apprehend its improvisatory character without losing the sense that everything in it appears out of an action and a reaction, and, most importantly, appreciates that even though Franck was closely acquainted with Classical techniques, choosing to remove himself so far from them does, in the end, make him his own kind of revolutionary, whatever Ravel said. **G** 

# **TOP CHOICE**

**Dumay; Collard** EMI **© 2** 381783-2

The main criticism often levied against this recording is that it can be too subtle at times, but for me the contrasts in it suggest a vocal element to the musical line, which gives it an almost human voice. This is particularly appealing, because Franck was



so uninterested in words - it was the music in its purest form that concerned him; and his phrases take on an almost spoken element as a result.

# Explore music via our themed listening suggestions – and why not create your own too?

e all love sharing our musical enthusiasms with friends. Here, three music lovers allow vou to glimpse some of their favourite music. Gramophone's Reviews Editor Andrew Mellor has selected 10 recordings which illustrate the range and richness of polyphonic music from 16th-century Spain and Portugal. Reviewer Pwyll ap Siôn explores the music of a group of American composers who refused to join the mainstream and remained steadfastly 'maverick'. And the harpsichordist and conductor Christophe Rousset reveals some of the musicians who have inspired him with their music-making and whose artistry is there for all to enjoy thanks to their recordings.

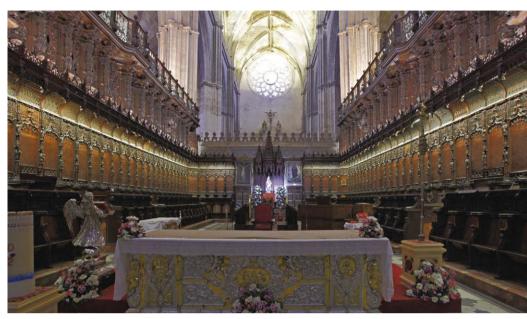
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# Iberian polyphony

# Andrew Mellor chooses 10 pieces which celebrate the rich outpouring of choral music in 16th-century Spain and Portugal

It might be so that the wealth of sacred polyphony to emerge from Spain and Portugal in the 16th century represents slightly more 'easy listening' than its varying counterparts in the Low Countries and Italy. But the beauty of Iberian polyphony is not only in its directness – so often built of short musical paragraphs of cumulative intensity, each draped with long, arching phrases and rounded off with a pronounced cadence - but also in its sense of heat and sweat: words more clearly and straightforwardly set (hence the 'polyphony lite' reputation) and a listening experience that's never short on scent and poetry as a result.

Victoria stands heads and shoulders above the top of the heap in terms of reputation and recording activity, even if his music fits the above description least when he's placed against some of his most interesting contemporaries. The long breath of Victoria's Masses can seem a long way from the immediacy of Tenebrae settings by Morales, Lobo and Cardoso – an



Seville Cathedral, where a great deal of Iberian polyphony originated; Alonso Lobo was also organist here

immediacy that sometimes borders on the secular. Either way, both styles delivered music as ravishing as it is nourishing. And speaking of easy listening, polyphony like this is particularly adept at cutting consistently through the whir of plane, train and automobile engines – while also providing food for thought on how specific styles emerged in specific territories, and then travelled.

Cardoso Missa Pro defunctis (Requiem)
 Schola Cantorum of Oxford /
 Jeremy Summerly

#### Naxos

 Morales Missa Mille Regretz Gabrieli Consort and Players / Paul McCreesh

# **Archiv Produktion**

 Alonso Lobo Lamentationes leremiae Prophetae

Monteverdi Choir / Sir John Eliot Gardiner **SDG** 

 Vivanco Missa Assumpsit Iesus Musica Reservata de Barcelona / Bruno Turner

#### La Má De Guido

 Victoria Tenebrae Responsories Tenebrae

# Archiv Produktion

Morales Missa Pro Defunctis (Requiem)
 Gabrieli Consort / Paul McCreesh
 Archiv Produktion

 Duarte Lobo Missa Pro Defunctis (Requiem) Schola Cantorum of Oxford; Oxford Camerata / Jeremy Summerly

# Music for the Duke of Lerma Gabrieli Consort / Paul McCreesh Archiv Produktion

 Alonso Lobo Missa Simile est Regnum Caelorum
 Musica Ficta / Raúl Malavibarrena
 Enchiriadis

From Spain to Eternity
Ensemble Plus Ultra
Archiv Produktion

# American Mavericks

# Pwyll ap Siôn on a handful of US composers who went their own way

The idea of the American maverick composer is by now so deeply engrained that it has almost become part of tradition. Therein lies the paradox. By definition, the maverick is a fearless innovator and iconoclast, a figure who – to paraphrase conductor Michael Tilson Thomas – composes 'outside the lines'. Yet, despite flaunting its beliefs and values, the maverick still has to engage with tradition in order to be understood, hence perhaps the surprising amount of orchestral music contained on this playlist.

Charles Ives is in many ways the most obvious starting point (although some may choose to look further back), and his

'Fourth of July' movement from the *Holidays Symphony* builds up to an exciting climax with its unpredictable collage of quotations.

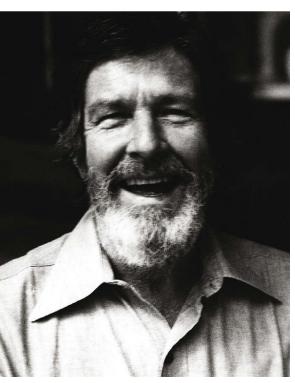
A sense of place can sometimes shape the outlook of a maverick, as found in the music of Conlon Nancarrow and John Luther Adams, both of whom spent significant parts of their creative lives working in relative isolation. Others have remained for many years right at the centre, such as Moondog and La Monte Young, yet have lost none of their non-conformist attitude.

The maverick is still a very male/macho construction but there have been a number of highly influential women too, among them Pauline Oliveros and Meredith Monk, and more recently Julia Wolfe. Not every maverick is loud and confrontational, although Glenn Branca's symphonic electric guitar music almost inevitably is. A completely different take is to be found in Harold Budd's benign, placid but equally revolutionary *Madrigals of the Rose Angel*. And, of course, any playlist would not be complete without the arch-maverick himself, John Cage.

- Ives Holidays Symphony 
   'Fourth of July'

   San Francisco SO / Michael Tilson Thomas

   Sony Classical
- Cage Concerto for Prepared Piano and Chamber Orchestra (Second Part) Margaret Leng Tan; American Composers Orchestra / Dennis Russell Davies ECM



The arch-maverick himself, John Cage

- Nancarrow Studies for Player Piano
   No 15 Calefax Reed Quintet; Ivo Janssen
   MDG
- **JL Adams** Become Ocean Seattle SO / Ludovic Morlot Cantaloupe
- Oliveros 'Deep Hockets'
   Dempster; Gamper; Oliveros
   Music & Arts Programs of America
- Monk 'Gotham Lullaby' Dolmen Music
   ECM
- **Branca** The Spectacular Commodity. The Ascension

Branca; Ranaldo; Sublette; Rosenbloom; Glenn; Wischerth

Acute

- Harold Budd 'Madrigals of the Rose Angel'
   Various artists / Harold Budd
   Virgin
- Moondog All is Loneliness Moondog
   Honest Jon's Records

# Influential musicians

# Christophe Rousset on the musicians whose recordings have most inspired him and broadened his horizons

Some recordings have been very important in my musical life; some for just a few inspired moments while others have been played thousands of times for the fascinating colour of a voice or for the dancing rhythm of a piece of music. Now everything is so accessible on the internet, I hardly know in what direction I should look to find the artist, the repertoire, the beauty I am seeking. It's the same feeling I had 10 years ago when record shops still existed, but now with even more choice: impossible then to trust any instinct or desire for the 'right' choice of the day.

Unless a music-lover follows a particular artist, it is quite difficult for them to be adventurous in their choices. Often I've bought recordings of a performer instead of just the repertoire. I discovered the violinist Sergey Khachatryan at the Festival of Menton in 2013: his very sober and highly sensible interpretation of the Beethoven Violin Concerto moved me to tears. Isabelle Faust often plays in the same venues I perform in: that's how I came to love her solo Bach. Going to opera houses from a young age helped me discover the greatest singers, but only a few touched my heart: Edita Gruberová in The Magic Flute, Natalie Dessay in Lakmé or Hamlet, Christian Gerhaher in Bach's St John's Passion. These are artists I have to follow on recordings, as I don't



Harpsichordist and conductor Christophe Rousset

often have the time these days to go to concerts as a member of the audience!

- Franck Violin Sonata Sergey Khachatryan Naïve
- Schubert Schwanengesang Christian Gerhaher
   Arte Nova
- Mozart Concert arias
   Edita Gruberová
   Decca
- Delibes Lakmé
   Natalie Dessay
   Erato
- Mozart Mitridate Rè di Ponto Les Talens Lyriques
   Decca
- Bach Solo Sonatas and Partitas Isabelle Faust Harmonia Mundi
- Vivaldi La Stravaganza Monica Huggett
- Ravel Orchestral works Seiji Ozawa
- Mozart Piano Concerto No 23
   Clara Haskil
   DG
- Ravel Gaspard de la nuit
  Alexandre Tharaud
  Harmonia Mundi

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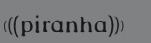
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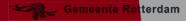
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# PERFORMANCES & EVENTS

Sir Simon Rattle brings the Sibelius symphonies to London with the Berlin Philharmonic and Leif Ove Andsnes performs three Beethoven concertos in one night at Carnegie Hall

# Amsterdam, Frankfurt, Madrid, Vienna and Paris

# The Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra take to the road, February 11-20

With their Chief Conductor Mariss Jansons on the podium, Amsterdam's great orchestra take two programmes on tour with them: Richard Strauss's *Der Bürger als Edelmann* and Mahler's Fourth, with Genia Kühmeier (to be heard in Amsterdam on February 11 and 12, Frankfurt on February 14, Madrid on February 16 and Vienna on February 18), and a concert of Spanish-flavoured fare by Debussy, Falla, Massenet and Respighi (Madrid on February 15 and Vienna on February 19). **concertgebouworkest.nl/en** 

# New York's Metropolitan Opera & cinemas worldwide

# An unusual operatic double-bill for Valentine's Day, February 14

Anna Netrebko takes the title-role in Tchaikovsky's rarely encountered *lolanta* about a blind girl experiencing love for the first time, while Bartók's *Bluebeard's Castle* offers an altogether darker view of love as the eponymous Duke takes his new bride on a tour of his castle. Nadja Michael sings Judith while Mikhail Petrenko is Bluebeard. Both operas are directed by Mariusz Treliński and conducted by Valery Gergiev. Catch them live at the Met or in cinemas, in HD sound, around the world.

metopera.org

# New York's Carnegie Hall & WQXR

# Andsnes plays three Beethoven piano concertos in one evening, February 23

Leif Ove Andsnes has been touring the world with his 'Beethoven Journey' for the past three years and has produced three outstanding discs along the way. His account of the First and Third Concertos (Vol 1) with the Mahler Chamber Orchestra was our Recording of the Month in November 2012, whilst the Second and Fourth (Vol 2) and Emperor (Vol 3) were both selected as Editor's Choice recordings. So this Carnegie Hall concert, which features the Second, Third and Fourth Concertos with Andsnes directing the Mahler Chamber Orchestra from the keyboard, promises to be very special indeed. The concert will be broadcast as part of the Carnegie Hall Live series on WQXR, which you can stream from its website or via its

carnegiehall.org; wqxr.org



# London's Southbank Centre and Barbican & BBC Radio 3

# A Rattle residency featuring Sibelius, Mahler and Lachenmann, February 10-15

Sir Simon Rattle, newly turned 60 and Britain's most famous living conductor, takes up a week-long London residency at the Southbank Centre and the Barbican. Along with his Berlin Philharmonic players, the five concerts will include a Sibelius symphony cycle and the composer's Violin Concerto (with acclaimed expert in the work and current *Gramophone* Artist of the Year Leonidas Kavakos), in honour of Sibelius's 150th anniversary (February 10-12), plus Mahler's Symphony No 2 and Helmut Lachenmann's *Tableau* (February 14-15). BBC Radio 3 will be broadcasting the residency in *Live in Concert*. **bbc.co.uk/radio3** 

# Vienna State Opera & streamed to your Smart TV or computer

# A verismo favourite live from the Austrian capital, February 24

Andrea Chénier, the opera which keeps Giordano's name alive, comes direct from the Vienna State Opera in the production by Otto Schenk. Choose your time zone and watch it at a time that's convenient (and read the subtitles simultaneously on your iPad). The cast is headed by Massimo Giordano (no relation!) in the title-role with Marco di Felice as Carlo Gérard and Martina Serafin as Maddalena de Coigny. Marco Armiliato, something of a specialist in the Italian repertoire, conducts.

staatsoperalive.com

# **Teatro Real, Madrid**

# A new operatic setting of Lorca's El público is unveiled, February 24 - March 13

Keeping up its reputation for new opera, Madrid's Teatro Real stages a new work by Mauricio Sotelo, in a staging by Robert Castro. Pablo Heras-Casado conducts the world premiere and a further seven performances of *El Público* which is considered Lorca's most heartfelt plea for sexual and artistic freedom. Lorca wrote the play in Cuba after a visit to New York at a time when he was exploring, with great intensity, some of the themes closest to his heart. The play juxtaposes the two ways in which art can function: the commercial and audience-pleasing versus the challenging and the controversial.

teatro-real.com/en

# Robin Ticciati conducts the Bamberg Symphony Orchestra in two memorial works

# Veronika Eberle joins the orchestra for Berg's Violin Concerto, February 25 & 26

Robin Ticciati returns to this fine Bavarian orchestra to conduct four works from the 20th and 21st centuries including Toshio Hosokawa's *Meditation*, a work dedicated to the victims of Japan's Tōhoku earthquake in 2011, and Alban Berg's Violin Concerto which memorialises Manon Gropius, the daughter of Alma Mahler and Walter Gropius (Veronika Eberle is the soloist). The programme also includes Sibelius's *Karelia* Suite and Seventh Symphony. The concert is being recorded for later broadcast by BR Klassik.

bamberger-symphoniker.de/en; br.de/radio/br-klassik/index.html

# St David's Hall, Cardiff & BBC Radio 3

# St David's Day Gala, March 1

The BBC National Orchestra and Chorus of Wales are joined by the inimitable Bryn Terfel, Wales's – and possibly the world's – most acclaimed baritone. Celebrating the music of Wales through song, Terfel and his fellow musicians perform a variety of music close to Terfel's heart. They are also joined by a selection of 'stars of the future', adding an element of freshness and excitement to proceedings. The concert, which starts at 4pm, is broadcast live on BBC Radio 3 and will be available on demand via the radio's website for a month after the event.

bbc.co.uk/radio3

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# Spotify, speakers - and new turntables!

The ways to listen may be ever-growing but the revival of vinyl just keeps on going



potify listeners are fast discovering an ever-diversifying range of ways to enjoy their choices and playlists, and the latest arrival is a line-up of speakers from Philips designed both for multiroom use and for direct Spotify Connect operation. Two models are available (initially via Amazon and then through selected retailers): the SW700M (£90) and the SW750M (£130) ①, and both speakers can be controlled from the Spotify app on smartphones or tablets once they're set up using the Philips SpeakerSet app, which can also be used to group up to four speakers together wirelessly. The SW700M speaker uses two 6.5cm full-range drive units, while the SW750M uses 7.5cm drivers plus tweeters to give a bigger sound. Both models also use twin bass-tuning ports.

Somewhat larger are the new SCM40A speakers from British company ATC, an active version of the SCM40 three-way floorstanding model launched late in 2013. Selling for £6280 a pair, the speakers combine ATC's in-house drive units with an active three-way crossover and internal Class A/B amplification; the newly designed 25mm soft-dome tweeter is driven by a 25W amplifier; the famous ATC 7.5cm midrange dome has its own 60W amplifier; and the 16.4cm bass unit,

with its 'under-hung' short coil/long gap motor, is driven by a 150W amplifier. The handbuilt cabinets have a curved design, braced and laminated for rigidity and damping, and finished in a choice of real cherry or black ash veneer, with a metal grille fixed by hidden magnets.

New from power conditioning specialists Isotek is the EVO3 Mosaic Genesis **3**, which combines the mains regeneration used in the EVO3 Genesis model, thus completely isolating connected equipment from any mains fluctuations, with the company's Direct-Coupled conditioning network used in the EVO3 Super Titan model. The £5995 unit has five power outlets: two designed for low-consumption front-end/source components, and three for power amplifiers and other high-current electronics. The EVO3 Mosaic Genesis comes complete with the company's EVO3 Premier mains cable, and is available with UK, EU, US and Australian sockets. It's distributed in the UK by Sound Foundations.

As you can read in this month's Audio Essay, there's a growing trend towards miniature hi-fi, with compact components available from a number of companies. One of the latest arrivals is the Sprout amplifier 4 from US manufacturer PS Audio, via UK distributor Signature

Systems. It has a moving-magnet phono stage, asynchronous USB and coaxial digital inputs with 24-bit/192kHz capability, analogue input, Bluetooth with aptX, and 50W-per-channel output, all in a package just 15cm wide, 20cm deep and 4.5cm tall. It sells for around £650 (expect a review soon).

Finally more turntables, to take advantage of the revival of interest in vinyl LPs. One is from Flexson, a company specialising in a range of accessories for the Sonos multiroom products: the £330 VinylPlay is built by UK specialists Rega and comes – in black or white – complete with a built-in phono stage enabling it to be connected directly to active speakers, amplifiers without phono provision, or the Sonos Play:5 or Sonos Connect units, and thus to any speaker(s) in a Sonos multiroom system.

TEAC has also launched a new turntable, the £300 TN-300 , which comes complete with a built-in phono stage and a USB output to allow it to be connected directly to a computer for recording. Like the Flexson it's a manual, belt-driven design, able to play 33 and 45rpm records, and the TEAC comes in a choice of black, red, cherry or white high-gloss finishes. The straight tonearm is pre-fitted with a high-quality Audio-Technica AT-95E cartridge and the turntable uses a heavy MDF plinth, die-cast aluminium platter and rubber mat. It's available now.

# **REVIEW PRODUCT OF THE MONTH**

# Marantz HD-DAC

Classic style meets class-leading performance

he HD-DAC1 isn't the first foray into 'desktop audio' by Marantz parent company D+M Group. The Denon DA-300USB was reviewed in these pages back on June, as was the same company's CEOL Carino speaker system, and they've now been joined by a pocketable Denon DAC, the £279 DA-10, and this very classy mains-powered digitalto-analogue converter/preamp headphone amp, selling for £679.

The first thing to note about the HD-DAC1 is that it draws on classic Marantz design cues. The main casework is in high-quality solid aluminium in either 'silvergold' or black, finished with highgloss wood-pattern side panels, while the main display is housed in the company's trademark 'porthole'. This is a piece of equipment as at home on the main hi-fi

# 'The personal listening experience is every bit as involving as that using speakers'

rack as it is beside the computer on the desk, for as well has having a headphone output on a 6.3mm socket on the front panel, and with both volume control and three-stage switchable gain (to cope with tricky headphone loads), it also has both fixed- and variable-level analogue outputs. That means it can be used as a DAC with conventional amplifiers or as a DAC/ preamp straight into power amplification.

To keep it bang up to date, the HD-DAC1 can accept PCM file formats up to 24-bit/192kHz and DSD2.8/5.6 files from a computer via its Type B asynchronous USB input on the rear panel, and also has two optical and one coaxial electrical digital inputs back there, and a USB Type A for memory devices, smartphones and tablets on the front. There's also a 3.5mm stereo analogue input socket on the rear panel, while the controls are kept simple: there's an input selector and a volume control, plus a set-up button to access menu options such as the display dimmer and headphone gain setting. A substantial remote control handset is supplied but there's also the option to control the DAC via an external device, such as one of Marantz's amplifiers, via a rear-panel socket and switch.

I first saw the HD-DAC1 at the annual Marantz Dealer Event back in June, and the impression I formed then - of an extremely covetable piece of equipment thanks to its compact dimensions (it's just 25cm wide) and exemplary 'fit and finish' - is borne out when the unit is unboxed and set up. This isn't a hi-fi toy - well, yes it is actually, but under the lid close attention has been paid to performance-optimisation: digital-toanalogue conversion uses the Cirrus Logic CS4398, a high-current audiophile design, while jitter removal, dual clocks and noise isolation for all the digital inputs are in place to ensure a pure sound. The famous Marantz HDAM and HDAM-SA2 Hyper Dynamic Amplifier Modules are also used, and the whole unit is built on a vibrationreducing double-layer base.

# **PERFORMANCE**

I spent some time at that Marantz event listening to the HD-DAC1 with a pair of



# **MARANTZ HD-DAC1**

**Type** DAC/headphone amplifier/preamp Price £679

Digital inputs Two optical and one electrical/ coaxial S/PDIF. USB-B asynchronous. iOScompatible USB-A on front panel

Analogue input 3.5mm stereo

File format compatibility 192kHz/24-bit on all rear-panel digital inputs, plus DSD2.8/5.6 support on asynchronous USB

Digital output Electrical/coaxial

Analogue outputs Fixed and variable level on RCA phonos, 6.3mm headphone socket

Finishes Black or 'silvergold' **Dimensions** (WxHxD) 25x9x27cm

marantz.co.uk

upmarket Denon headphones; and having spent some more time with the Marantz at home, and with a variety of headphones, I find I like this accomplished headphone amp/DAC very much.

I used the Marantz with my MacBook Air computer running Audirvarna software, connected using a 5m Chord Company USB SilverPlus cable, and both as a headphone amp with models including the Oppo PM-1, B&O H6 and B&W P3, and as a DAC into my Naim Supernait 2 amplifier. As usual with devices of this kind, no drivers are needed when using the HD-DAC1 with Mac computers but a download of Windows drivers is provided

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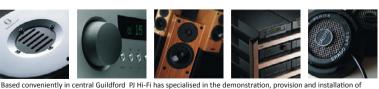












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# SUGGESTED PARTNERS

Not just a fine headphone amp: it can also function as a DAC/preamp. Here are some partner ideas...

#### **OPPO PM-2**

Using the same drivers as the flagship PM-1 headphones but with slightly less exotic materials in the headband and ear-cushions, the PM-2 is a more affordable but still excellent design.



## **FOCAL CMS 40**

The smallest active monitors in Focal's pro monitor range, these excellent compact speakers will connect directly to the variable output of the Marantz to create a desktop system.



on the Marantz website. I loaded these on to the Acer netbook I keep to hand for just this purpose, and all worked exactly as expected.

On the Macs, once the DAC was selected on the sound menu and the Audio Midi settings adjusted, the system worked smoothly and without incident, with everything from internet radio stations to DSD5.6 downloads. Put simply, the Marantz manages to be both a very accomplished digital-to-analogue converter when used between a computer and an audio system, and also an excellent headphone amplifier. It's able to drive a wide range of headphone models with the kind of control and conviction I've previously only encountered when using the Oppo HA-1 headphone amp/DAC, which after all is getting on for twice the price.

This is unmistakably a Marantz product, with powerful bass, excellent detail retrieval and, above all, the direct communication of the musical performance that's a hallmark of so many of the company's products. Marantz may not be the first arrival in the rapidly growing 'desktop audio' market but in taking its time it's come up with a product combining refinement and musical excitement, and having the power to drive headphones hard while keeping a tight grip on them.

Even more to the point, this is unmistakably a Ken Ishiwata product. I've experienced Marantz designs going back at least 20 years and this one has the same spark of magic that set products such as the original CD-63MkII KI Signature CD player apart from the pack. It's all to do with the sheer enjoyment of fine music played well.

That means excellent dynamics and effortless stereo imaging, ensuring that the personal listening experience is every bit as involving as that using speakers, and at times – especially when using top-quality headphones such as the Oppos – even more so. In my review of the Oppo headphones, I said that while they don't present a particularly demanding load, the headphones do thrive when used with a high-quality headphone amplifier with a bit of 'shove' behind it, and that's just what the Marantz delivers, really bringing out the best in these very fine headphones.

Mind you, it's also able to maximise the enjoyment of headphones with more modest prices and aspirations, thanks to the combination of lightning-fast and hard-hitting dynamics, warmth and control in the bass and a wide-open midband and treble. That applies whether one chooses to play music at 'I just want some peace' levels or indulge in some air-baton with large-scale works at edge-of-the-platform levels: the Marantz is one of those exemplary pieces of hi-fi that 'just goes louder' with no signs of having to work hard.

Playing the excellent 'Dances for Piano and Orchestra' by Joel Fan and the Northwest Sinfonietta on Reference Recordings, the Marantz delivers the piano with exemplary scale and weight, placing it credibly within a believable acoustic with the rest of the musical forces – impressive through speakers but even more so with headphones.

But talking of speakers, the Marantz sounds just as good when used as a digital-to-analogue converter into a conventional hi-fi system – in this case the Supernait 2 driving the Bowers & Wilkins CM8 S2 speakers reviewed last month. It complements the speed and power of this combination perfectly, creating a sound that's always well controlled but at the same time exuberant and totally involving.

With the recent Resonus release of early Britten works, 'Journey to Aldeburgh', the Marantz delivers the fine detail of the music in an entirely captivating manner, balancing the two instruments in the Suite for violin and piano to give a real sense of the performance laid out before the listener, and showing its deft touch in the second part of the composer's Sinfonietta, Op 1, again with those glorious instrumental textures very much in evidence to ravishing effect.

The HD-DAC1 is one of those rather special pieces of hi-fi not encountered so often these days. It manages to combine two functions and do both equally well, while being both very sensibly priced and, as I may have mentioned, really very desirable. If you're serious about the 'Macs and DACs' route to computer music or just take your headphone listening very seriously, it's definitely one to audition. **6** 

# Or you could try...

There's been a boom in the availability of headphone amplifiers in recent times, reflecting the increasing popularity of headphone listening, both at home and on the move. You can buy a simple amplifier designed to connect to the headphone output of a smartphone or tablet for around £100 or so; it'll be powered by internal rechargeable batteries and, when used with high-quality headphones, will offer a better sound than the output stage of the portable device alone.

#### **TEAC's HPA-50**

Or you can opt for a headphone amp designed to accept a digital

signal, either from the dock connector on a smartphone or tablet, or a USB output on a home or portable computer. TEAC's HPA-50, at £249, works in this way, along with a dedicated TEAC HR Audio Player app designed to allow iOS devices - iPad, iPhones and the like - to play high-resolution music files directly through this portable DAC/amplifier. You can download the app from TEAC's website at **teac-audio.eu**. The HPA-50 will run for around eight hours and will work with Android devices too.

#### **Oppo HA-1 headphone amplifier**

Designed to complement the company's

PM-1 and PM-2 headphones, the Oppo HA-1



is a mains-powered headphone amplifier/DAC/preamplifier, like the Marantz. It draws on high-end Blu-ray technology, employing both the ESS Sabre32 digital-to-analogue conversion and analogue output stage. Digital inputs are provided on a range of connections including asynchronous USB; there's also aptX Bluetooth for wireless connection to portable devices; and analogue inputs and outputs are provided on both conventional RCA sockets and balanced XLRs. A remote control app for iOS and Android is available from **oppodigital.co.uk**. The HA1 costs £1199.

opposigitai.co.ak. The TIMT costs 21135

# REVIEW RUARK R7

# Proper hi-fi in designer clothes

Unashamedly retro radiogram has a very modern twist

f you're of a certain age, you will either have owned a radiogram or grown up with a relative who had one. The hi-fi system as furniture was a fixture in many a home, whether in the living room, the lounge, the drawing room or just the front room. It combined a record player, a radio tuner, an amplifier and a pair of speakers, usually with some additional storage space for records.

Whether you fancied something vaguely attuned to contemporary interior design trends or a Gothic revival, Chippendale or Louis XVI radiogram, you could buy one all the way up to the early 1970s, when the much more compact 'music centre', complete with separate speakers, came into vogue with its big Perspex cover usually protecting an amplifier, record player and cassette deck. And lo, the music centre begat the stack system, the stack system the midi-system and the midi the modern mini-system, exemplified by the likes of the Denon D-M39.

# 'I couldn't help thinking that this model might be a retro step too far. I needn't have been concerned'

However, having reinvented the table-top radio with its classic R1 – now in third-generation form – back in 2006, and growing its range with the stereo R2 and the R41, complete with iPod dock, radio tuner and CD player, British company Ruark believes that now is the time for the radiogram revival. The result? The launch in 2014 of the £2000 Ruark R7, inspired by early-1960s design with its spindle legs, and described by the company as a 'revolutionary music centre in the true spirit of the classic radiogram'.

In classic Ruark style (company co-founder the late Brian O'Rourke was apprenticed to a leading furniture-maker straight from school, and produced radio and TV cabinets in the 1950s and '60s before moving into the hi-fi arena), the R7 is designed both as high-quality audio equipment and as a striking piece of furniture. It may look a bit 'baby giraffe' with those spindly legs but when you unpack it you discover that it weighs 30kg and can also take an optional AV mount that's able to support TVs of at least 50in,

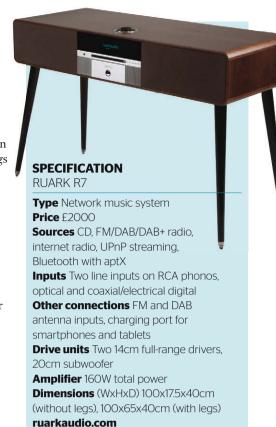
so 'solidly engineered' hardly covers the way the R7 is built. The wood on the main cabinet is real walnut veneer and those legs are black lacquered, and there's also the option of puck feet if you want to use the system on a (substantial) shelf, console table or whatever.

Under the skin there's a radio tuner with DAB, DAB+ and FM reception, complete with separate digital and analogue aerial feeds, Wi-Fi connectivity for internet radio and streaming from network storage, a slot-loading CD player able to play both conventional Red Book and MP3 discs, and Bluetooth with aptX for streaming straight from smartphones, tablets and computers. There are switchable digital/analogue inputs for external sources (optical and coaxial digital, plus two sets of line analogue inputs), and both tone controls and 'enhanced 3D sound processing' to make the most of the performance of the 160W amplification driving two 14cm dual concentric main speakers and a 20cm long-throw subwoofer. An output is provided for a pair of headphones, and the RotoDial control on the top panel detaches to become the remote control for the system, operating on radio frequency rather than the more common infrared, so it doesn't need 'line of sight' to the R7.

## **PERFORMANCE**

I have to admit to coming to the Ruark R7 with mixed expectations. I was aware of how well the company's less expensive models perform but couldn't help thinking that this model might be all about style rather than substance and a retro step too far. I needn't have been concerned. Once installed on its legs and set up (definitely a two-person job), and connected to the various aerials and the home network, the R7 proves capable of a sound to amaze, both in the scale and weight it delivers and in the way it fills a room with sound while maintaining an attractive stereo image.

In other words, this is very definitely a proper hi-fi system in designer clothes, not just a novelty for those who are willing to trade performance for chic looks. There's nothing else quite like the Ruark R7 on the market – and probably hasn't been for at least 40 years! – and I'm not in the least surprised that this handbuilt product is proving highly popular.



Operating the system is made simple by the combination of the intuitive RotoDial remote handset and a large, clear display, and the set-up menus readily connect the system to a home Wi-Fi network, tune in radio stations and allow selections such as tone and subwoofer controls, Bluetooth pairing and 3D sound on/off. Incidentally, I found the 3D sound a bit too spacey and disorientating, so stuck to listening with it off.

Apart from that foible, this is a highly convincing all-in-one stereo system that's as at home playing CDs as it is streaming music from the home network, excellent when connected to an external antenna for FM or DAB, and even enjoyable when streaming radio over the internet.

Orchestral music has fine scale and definition, plus a real sense of sound stage size and focus, while smaller-scale pieces benefit from the overall clarity on offer here. Yes, there's a slight tendency to rather 'Third Programme' warmth and bloom when listening to Radio 3 all day but a little lift in the treble, perhaps with a slight tweak down on the bass (depending on where you have the system positioned), soon injects the spark back into the sound.

This is a remarkable system and a real credit to the Ruark engineers, who have created something innovative and, for the moment, unique – though I'm sure it won't be long before it's copied. **G** 



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# **ESSAY**

# Small...but perfectly formed



Hi-fi is shrinking to meet modern tastes and needs but the performance of these Lilliputians is still highly attractive

ou know that old saying about knowing you're getting old when the policemen start to look young? I'm wondering whether something similar is happening to me as another year dawns, in that suddenly hi-fi is apparently seeming to shrink.

Over the past year or two it seems I've been sent ever-smaller items to review, from amplifiers and DACs to storage and speakers, all of which offer performance way beyond what we once expected from 'micro-systems' – those tiny one-box-plus-speakers set-ups that filled the shelves of mass-market retailers before it seemed the whole world made the switch first to iPod docks and then to Bluetooth speakers.

Mind you, for many people it seems an iPhone or Android tablet or whatever, used with a Bluetooth speaker, is their entire music system: it can be used in the home or – in many cases – dropped in a bag when on the move and used with its internal rechargeable battery wherever you end up. And while it's true there are some pretty nasty little plastic speakers, demonstrating just how cheaply a Bluetooth chipset, a digital amplifier and a couple of mini speaker units can be assembled into something able to make a noise, there's also a number of rather good speakers ranging from the pocketable to the desktop.

I have sitting on my desk at the moment a very small Pioneer speaker, from its FreeMe range. It sells for around £100, is just 15cm wide and less than 5cm tall, yet packs two 4cm drive units and can play for up to seven hours on a single charge. OK, so it's not going to replace a complete high-end audio system, but for music on

the move, or just in an extra room, it's more than acceptably enjoyable.

Talking of music on the go, there's a growing range of very compact headphone amplifiers able to give a much better sound than the electronics built into popular pocket music players, especially when used with some high-quality headphones. I've long been a fan of the Fiio E12 Mont Blanc headphone amplifier, which I use with the same company's X3 portable digital player, but of late a number of only slightly bulkier rivals have appeared, all able to take

# 'The biggest change of late has been the shrinking of amplification'

a digital feed from computers, smartphones, tablets and the like. The AudioQuest Dragonfly was one of the first and has been joined by the likes of the Meridian Explorer and Director, TEAC's HA-P50, Onkyo's similar DAC-HA200 and, most recently, the Denon DA-10.

However, home audio – the mainspowered stuff, designed for stationary use – also seems to be on the shrink. For some time now I've been using a pair of British company Neat's very small Iota speakers as my desktop companions, fed from an admittedly standard-size NaimUniti all-in-one network music system. Just 13cm tall and 20cm wide, the Iotas are of a two-way bass reflex design, using a 10cm mid/bass unit and a 5cm ribbon tweeter, and are capable of a lucid, involving sound with everything from decent internet radio to high-resolution music files.



Anticlockwise from top left: the brown leather Pioneer FreeMe speaker, the white Denon DA-10, the Musical Fidelity Merlin amplifier, a Neat lota speaker and (above) the tiny Sprout amplifier

But the biggest change of late has been the shrinking of amplification. In recent months in these pages there have been reviews of the NAD D3020 amplifier (10/14) and the Pro-ject MaiA (11/14), the latter being the latest model from Pro-ject's Box Design range, which started with a little offboard phono amplifier for the company's turntable and has gone on to encompass everything from headphone amplifiers to CD players, and from solid state to valve-powered models.

Joining those two are the Quad Vena and the brand-new Musical Fidelity Merlin, both with Bluetooth as well as conventional inputs, and designed for everything from desktop use to filling small rooms. And the thinking is clear: these are products designed to lure the users of those little Bluetooth speakers back into exploring hi-fi systems. Or, as Musical Fidelity founder Antony Michaelson put it me, describing the complete turntable/ amplifier/speakers system of which the Merlin is a part, 'This isn't for the audiophiles: this is designed for civilians.'

And it seems the trend is spreading. In the USA, companies such as Schiit Audio and Peachtree Audio are making this kind of miniature audio product. I was interested to see the latest product from Colorado high-end manufacturer PS Audio: called the Sprout, this is a £650 amplifier just about small enough to hold in one hand, and yet it's complete with Bluetooth aptX, an onboard 24-bit/192kHz DAC complete with asynchronous USB input, movingmagnet phono and line analogue input, and a 50W per channel output into 4 ohms as well as a 6.3mm headphone output.

I've only had a brief listen to a Sprout under show conditions, courtesy of UK distributor Signature Audio Systems, where it was driving a pair of floorstanding speakers to good effect, and that was sufficient to convince me to order a review sample. Hopefully I'll have that review for you soon – and I get the feeling there will be lots more good things in small packages during 2015. **6** 



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# NOTES & LETTERS

In praise of Cecilia Bartoli's Salieri · Barry Rose recognised · The best L'enfance du Christ?

Write to us at Gramophone, Mark Allen Group, St. Jude's Church, Dulwich Road, London SE24 oPB or gramophone@markallengroup.com

# Bravo Bartoli!

I agree with Lindsay Kemp that Cecilia Bartoli deserves special praise for her series of 'lavishly realised' project albums (Reviews, November). Bartoli could have done quite splendidly limiting herself to the standard repertory and maybe, from a purely commercial vantage point, that would have been the wisest path to maintain. But she has strayed from that well-trodden path. Because of her fame, her explorations have enjoyed far more circulation than if a less-celebrated vocalist had recorded these albums.

Hard to pick a favourite, but I have a soft spot for her Antonio Salieri album. Lazy, uninformed consensus had consigned the big bad wolf of *Amadeus* to a bin of mental categorisation labelled 'mediocre composers'. Bartoli wasn't buying the conventional unwisdom. Her advocacy of a composer who generated a staggering output of music – music that very few individuals on earth could whistle five bars of – reminds me of the wise words I once saw on a bumper sticker: 'Don't believe everything you think'.

Somerville, MA, USA

David English

# An icon of cathedral music

It is heartening to see *Gramophone* saluting Barry Rose (Icons, December).

The cathedral music tradition, guided by the likes of Barry Rose over a long career, sets boys' (and now girls') singing at a remarkably high standard and is indisputably one of the pillars of the UK's musical renaissance. It may



Barry Rose: an inspiring figure of the choral world

# Letter of the Month

# In search of the ideal L'enfance du Christ

Thank you for the article about Berlioz's L'enfance du Christ (Collection, December). This is a work that often gets overlooked, with all the attention paid to larger and more spectacular works celebrating the Christmas season. As the author Geoffrey Norris points out, this work has a 'purity and simplicity' to it that perhaps is most fitting to the subject matter, and the analysis by sections is especially well done.

However, in my judgement the author overlooked the reading that best exemplifies these qualities, namely the classic recording by one of the Berlioz experts of an earlier time, Charles Munch. As in his recording of the Berlioz Requiem, Munch – in his command of the Boston Symphony, the New England Conservatory Chorus and the soloists – strikes that superb
'balance between drama
and devoutness' that the
work requires. Florence
Kopleff and Gerard
Souzay, while perhaps
not as well known as
other soloists, more
than carry their
own as Mary and
Joseph, respectively,
and Cesare Valletti

does a superb job of integrating the work in the roles of Narrator and Centurion. And the 'Shepherds' Farewell', which I often pick out for

a repeat hearing, is especially poignant. As a bonus, the two-disc set also includes a beautiful rendition of Les nuits d'été by Leontyne Price with Fritz Reiner and the Chicago Symphony. David Messer

Royersford, PA, USA

Ed – Munch's recording wasn't included in the article as it is no longer widely available

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Please send letters responding to articles in this issue for consideration for publication in the March issue by February 6. *Gramophone* reserves the right to edit all letters for publication.

PRESTÖ

predate Venezuela's El Sistema by 150 years but both of them actually underline the clear social, musical and even economic benefit of putting ambitious music-making at the heart of society, not at its fringe.

But the success of El Sistema and the cathedral music tradition will always depend on those central, inspiring musical individuals. In that sense, Barry Rose is very much the Dudamel of the cathedral music tradition – tough and disciplined in the service of great music, with heaps of musical charisma and an innate grasp of how to work with young people and help them aspire to high standards.

Former Barry Rose choristers – and there are a few thousand of us – always have their fond anecdotes of the man who can still recall every former chorister, by name, even 40 years on. If Evensong hadn't been good enough, we at St Paul's Cathedral would often be observed heading back into the choir stalls to get it right. But no one much minded; it helped hone our skills. No wonder so many Rose choristers were inspired to become music teachers and music professionals.

Meanwhile let us celebrate a long and outstanding career – truly an icon. *Barry Holden, via email* 

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# Editorial notes

In Jeremy Dibble's review of Elgar's 'Binyon Settings' on Somm (January, page 69), he refers to 'the Philharmonia Chorus (trained under the sure, sympathetic hand of Simon Halsey)' when in fact it was the London Symphony Chorus, as indicated in the titling information at the start of the review.

Referring to the picture caption alongside the review of the 40-CD box-set of Pierre Monteux (January, page 84), the date of the conductor's final RCA recording was actually 1961, not 1958. In addition, the recording of Verdi's *La traviata* had in fact been released previously on Testament (6/05).

In the number one choice in Specialist's Guide (January, page 102) – a CD of King's College Choir from 1989 – there is a reference to the previous Music Director David Willcocks whereas in fact Stephen Cleobury's predecessor was Philip Ledger (1974-82). Willcocks, meanwhile, held the position from 1957.

# **OBITUARIES**

MICHAEL KENNEDY

Music critic and author Born February 19, 1926 Died December 31, 2014



Michael Kennedy, onetime *Gramophone* contributor and for many years music critic of the *Daily Telegraph*, has died; he was 88. Born in Chorlton-cum-

Hardy, Kennedy joined the *Telegraph* in 1941 at the age of 15 and became its Music Critic in 1948, a role he finally stepped down from in 2005 having also spent a quarter century (1960-86) as the paper's Northern Editor. From 1989 to 2005 he was Chief Music Critic of the *Sunday Telegraph*.

An authority on the music of Sir Edward Elgar, Richard Strauss and Ralph Vaughan Williams, Kennedy wrote extensively on these composers, including a number of fine biographies. Other subjects that formed part of his substantial output included Sir John Barbirolli, Sir Adrian Boult, Sir William Walton and Charles Hallé as well as studies of the Buxton Festival and the Hallé Orchestra. He wrote numerous sleeve- and programme-notes and record reviews. He was also a regular voice on BBC Radio 3. James Jolly

# GUIDO AJMONE-MARSAN

Conductor Born March 24, 1947 Died November 19, 2014



A pupil of the Italian conducting teacher Franco Ferrara, Guido Ajmone-Marsan came to prominence at the age of 22 when he won a major conducting

competition in Florence, closely followed by successes in the Cantelli and Mitropolous competitions. His big international break came in 1973, when he won both the LSO/Rupert Foundation competition in London (which included as its prize a one-year assistantship with the orchestra) and the Solti International Conductor's Competition in Chicago one month later.

His Covent Garden debut was in 1983 and he made a triumphant debut at the Met with *Rigoletto* in 1990. He was also Music Director of the Essen Opera in Germany from 1986-90 and was responsible for the revival of that company's fortunes. He served as conductor for the Cardiff Singer of the World between 1990 and 1995.

James Jolly

# ELENA OBRAZSTOVA

Mezzo-soprano Born July 7, 1937 Died January 12, 2015



The Russian mezzosoprano has died at the age of 75. Obraztsova became a soloist at the Bolshoi Theatre in 1964 and went on to appear at the Met, La Scala and Covent Garden.

She made several notable recordings, frequently alongside Plácido Domingo, perhaps most famously starring in Franco Zeffirelli's staging of Carmen at La Scala opposite Domingo's Don José with Carlos Kleiber conducting (a recording available on DVD). Other recordings include Azucena in Herbert von Karajan's EMI Il trovatore, Amneris in Aida from La Scala with Claudio Abbado on the podium, Mascagni's Cavalleria rusticana again opposite Domingo on DG under Georges Prêtre (DVD), Saint-Saëns's Samson et Dalila for DG in Paris with Daniel Barenboim and Massenet's Werther for DG with Riccardo Chailly conducting. James McCarthy

# NEXT MONTH MARCH 2015



# Shining a light on Schumann

We talk to some of today's leading soloists and conductors - all of whom have recently embarked on explorations of the composer's music - and discover what Schumann means to them

# The hi-fi boom

Mike Ashman looks back to a defining era in the history of recorded sound - the decade after the Second World War

# More than a curiosity: Nielsen's Sinfonia espansiva

David Patrick Stearns chooses the top recordings of Nielsen's Third Symphony in celebration of the composer's 150th anniversary

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# REVIEWS INDEX

Λ	Boulez	D	Glinka	Josquin
A	Anthèmes 70	) <del>-</del>	—— Hymn <b>8</b> :	
Adams	Bowden	Davies, HW	Godowsky	O Domine Jesu Christe
Chamber Symphony	Lines written a few miles below 68		83 Contrapuntal Paraphrase on Invitation	
Ágústsson	Brahms	Davis, M	to the Dance 69  Goudimel	de Passione)
Formgerð II (Structure II)	45 Cello Sonatas – Nos 1 & 2		<b>Goudimel</b> Esprits divins, chantons dans	K
Albéniz	Ophelia-Lieder (arr Reimann) 84  Scherzo (FA.F.) WoO2 50		96 la nuit sainte 8:	3 Kabalevsky
Mallorca, Op 202  Anonymous/Hollande	Scherzo, 1 M E, WOOZ	Préludes	96 Granados	Cello Concerto No 2
Plaisir n'ay plus que vivre	Three Piano Trios (two versions of No 1, Op 8) 50		Danza espanola No 4, 'Villanesca' 72	
en desconfort	Three Violin Sonatas		61 Graupner	Kaipainen
Arcadelt	Braunfels	Dietheim	Trio Sonatas – various 54	
Missa Noe noe - Kyrie; Agnus Dei			39 Gray, A	Kapustin
Ariosti	Bridge	'Now the path completes the	1914	Five Etudes in Different Intervals,
Marte placato - Sa il crudel	95 Allegro D+5		39 Grechaninov	Op 68
Le profezie d'Eliseo nell'assedio	Introduction and Allegro	Passacaglia, 'A white Christmas rose	Tote Blätter 84	Miaciaturian
di Samaria – Prole tenera	95 The Moon	in the snow on the small grave',	Grieg	Piano Concerto 👺 3
La placidia – Sinfonia; Tal vicina	Sinfonietta On 1	Op 324	39 String Quartet, Op 27 54 Grieg (trans Ginzburg)	Kircinier
a Giglio	95 Suite, Op 6	Dodgson		Piano Trio 6
В	Bridge (arr Britten)	Oboe Quartet	In the hall of the mountain king	1 Koshkin
Bach, JS	There is a willow grows aslant	Dohnányi Piano Quintets – Nos 1 & 2	53 Gubaidulina	Bergen Concerto 3
Brandenburg Concertos	a brook →5	Du Caurroy	Hommage à Marina Tsvetayeva 8	Kotcheff
English Suites – Nos 1, 3 & 5	28 Britten	Fantaisies - No 4 sur Conditor	So sei es 💆 54	gone into night are all the eyes 6
Goldberg Variations	Violin Concerto, Op 15	alme syderum; No 30 sur	Guilmant	Kreisler
Ich ruf zu dir, Herr Jesu Christ,	Brouwer	Une jeune fillette; No 31	Fantaisie, Op 17 – Marche funèbre	Viennese Rhapsodic Fantasietta 97
	Guitar Concerto No 3,	sur Úne jeune fillette	et chant séraphique 72	
	*Concerto elegiaco' 3	One jeune pucche	83	Gott, sei mir gnädig nach deiner Güte 84
Orchestral Suites	97   Bruhns	Dvořák	H	- Guice
Orchestral Suites, BWV1066-69	Ich liege und schlafe 84  Busch	Symphonies – Nos 4 & 8	31 Hahn, R	L
Passacaglia and Fugue, BWV582	72 Drei Lieder 84	.   🕳	Piano Concerto in E 90	5 Lasser
Selections from Cantatas –	Busch, W	E	Sonatine in C 90	
Nos 120 & 132	97 Cello Concerto 45	Elfman	Handel	the Child'
Solo Violin Partita No 2,		Hitchcock – End Credits Music	<b>46</b> Rodelinda <b>≦ № 9</b> 0	
BWV1004	Jesu, meines Lebens Leben,	Elgar	Hawkins	Choral works 78
Solo Violin Partita No 2, BWV1004 – Chaconne	BuxWV62 84	Violin Concerto, Op 61	45 Bobop 68	-
Baillie	Jubilate Domino 97		Haydn	Approaching a City 5
Intro: I Sallied Out	47 <b>C</b>	Falla	Sinfonia concertante, HobI/105	_
Passing Places	47	Piano Works – various	Symphony No 101, 'The Clock' 90 Trumpet Concerto, HobVIIe/1 3:	
Baldassare	Сатроен	Farmé	32 Trumpet Concerto, HobVIIe/1 3:	Tudouit printrasdeus
Il giudizio di Paride – Il goder un	Two Extremes 68	)   '''	96 The Man Who Knew Too Much –	Sextuor mixte 55 Toccata sesta d'après Frescobaldi 55
bel sembiante	95 Canteloube	T . NT 1.4	69 Concert Overture	
Balfour Gardiner, H	Colloque sentimental 84	Nocturnes – Nos 6 & 13	96 North by Northwest – Main Titles 40	
Songs – various	78 Chausson Chanson perpétuelle. Op 37	F::	Psycho: A Narrative for	Quintet, Op 50
Banks	Chanson perpétuelle, Op 37  Chin	Introit, Op 6	45 String Orchestra 40	Scherzo concreto On 58
Violin Concerto	45 Piano Etudes	' '	Vertigo – Prelude; Scène d'amour 40	Variazioni pastorale, Op 8
Barber		Violin Concerto, Op 11	45 Hindemith	Lekeu
Summer Music, Op 31	59 Chopin  Ballades – Nos 1-4	Frantes	Melancholie, Op 13 – No 3, Dunkler	NT .
Bartók	Études – Op 10; Op 25	·   D   1   2	Tropfe; No 4, Traumwald Sonata in D, Op 11 No 2 95	•
Concerto for two pianos, percussion	D :: Y O ::	01:0	53 Hoddinott	Salutes to Seven Poets 53
and orchestra	Mazurkas – Op 63 No 3;	Space Factory – III; IV; V; VI	Nocturnes and Cadenzas, Op 62 4	
Beethoven Complete Piano Sonatas	O (0 N) 3	_ · '	Holst	Paganini Variations for two
*	Diano Conata No 2		68 Double Concerto, Op 49	
Overtures – various Quintet for Piano and Winds,	Preludes 96		Invocation, Op 19 No 2	l -
Quintet for Piano and Winds, Op 16	59 Preludes, Op 28 70		Lyric Movement 4	Etudes d'exécution transcendante –
Sonata in C minor, Op 30 No 2	97 Three Impromptus 69	Lascio d'esser Ninfa	95 Howells	No 4, Térek; No 5, Nuit d'été,
, r	Trois nouvelles Études 64	Il fonte della salute aperto dalla gra:	zia Oboe Sonata 6	No 6, Tempête
Symphonies – No 3, 'Eroica'; No 5;	Clérambault	nel Calvario – So che piace a gli occhi tuoi (Aria di	Hughes, C	M
	<b>96</b> Miserere a 3 <b>78</b>	misericordia)	95 Dance Variations on 'Rudolph the	MacCump
Symphony No 9, 'Choral'	30 Coleridge-Taylor	La decima fatica d'Ercole – Sento	red-nosed reindeer' 72	The Land of the Mountain and
Benjamin, A	Violin Concerto, Op 80		95	the Flood (arr Cull)
The Man Who Knew Too Much –	Compère	Il mese di Marzo consecrato a Mart	re – Ives	Maconchy
The Storm Clouds (cantata,	In nomine Jesu (Officium de Cruce)83	Non sdegnar	95 Piano Trio 6	-
,	46 Connesson		Three Places in New England –	Mahler
The Storm Clouds (cantata,	Techno Parade 59	G	The Housatonic at Stockbridge 4	
,	Copland	Gerhard		Másson
Bononcini	Appalachian Spring 47	Violin Concerto	45 <b>J</b>	Haustljóð: Poème d'automne
	I -	Gershwin	Jacob	Matthews, D
	95 Costeley	00.0		
Amante ozioso	Allons gay bergiere 83		32 Seven Bagatelles 6	1 Mirror Canon 59
Amante ozioso	95   ·		32 Seven Bagatelles 6 Janáček	Mirror Canon String Quartets – No 1, Op 4;
Amante ozioso Il ritorno di Giulio Cesare vincitore	Allons gay bergiere 83	Rhapsody in Blue Gilles		String Quartets – No 1, Op 4;
Il ritorno di Giulio Cesare vincitore della Mauritania – E pur le	Allons gay bergiere 83 Couperin, F	Rhapsody in Blue Gilles	Janáček	String Quartets – No 1, Op 4;

**128 GRAMOPHONE** FEBRUARY 2015 gramophone.co.uk

				i		1		REVIEWS IN	1DE
McCabe		Parry		Rose, B		Till Eulenspiegels lustige Stre		Wesley, SS	
La primavera	46	Songs of Farewell	83	Chimes	72	Op 28	59	Holsworthy Church Bells	72
McDowall		Penderecki		Rubbra		Stravinsky		Widmann, J	
Church bells beyond the stars	72	Cadenza	57	Soliloquy, Op 57	45	Capriccio	<u>\$ 42</u>	Etudes I-III	70
Medtner		Capriccio per Radovan	57	Ruehr		Concerto for Piano and Wind		Widor	
Fairy Tale, Op 26 No 3	72	Ciaccona in memoriam		Adirenne and Amy	58	Instruments	<u></u> 42	Etudes I-III	7
Melani		Giovanni Paolo II	57	Klein Suite	58	Movements	<b>9.42</b>	Wieniawski	-
Marian Vespers	79	Per Slava	57			Petrushka	<b>9</b> 42		_
*	15			Lift	58	Suslin		Polonaise, Op 4	9
Mendelssohn		Prelude	57	Prelude Variations	58	1756	<b>9</b> 54	Williams	
Largo and Allegro	57	Sextet	57	Second Violin Sonata	58	Capriccio über die Abreise	<b>9</b> 54	Mr Punch	68
Piano Quartets - Nos 1 & 3	57	Three Miniatures	57	The Scarlatti Effect	58			Wolf	
Meredith		Petrassi		Rütti		Grenzübertritt	<u>\$</u> .54	Italian Serenade	54
Charged	68	Coro di morti	79	Symphony, 'The Visions		Mobilis	<u>\$ 54</u>	V	-
Mertz		Noche oscura	79	of Niklaus von Flüe'"	20	Sonata capricciosa	<b>9</b> 54		
Fantaisie hongroise	72		79	of Niklaus von Flue	39	Symanowski		Ysaÿe	
U	12	Partita				Twelve Studies, Op 33	<b>9</b> 68	Solo Violin Sonatas, Op 27 –	
Milhaud		Quattro Inni sacri	79	5		_		No 2; No 4	70
L'Orestie d'Eschyle	91	Pettersson		Sadikova		T			
Moe		Symphonies – Nos 4 & 16	№ 38		68	Taneyev		1	
We Happy Few	61	Platti		La Baroque	90	_	0.5	Collections	
Moeran		Twelve Caprices, Op 25	66	Saint-Saëns		Twelve Choruses, Op 27 – ex	cs <b>85</b>	Duo d'Accord – 'Hommage	
Violin Concerto	45	Pleton	-	Les barbares	92	Tartini-Kreisler		à Weber'	69
Monteverdi				Works for Cello and Orchestra -		Devil's Trill Sonata	97		0.
		O beata infantia	83	Various	39	Tchaikovsky		Anonymous 4 –	<b>98</b>
Vespro della Beata Vergine	79	Poulenc		Sandström, S-D		The Cherubic Hymn	85		mitties d
Moore, D		Sextet, Op 100	59	Nordic Mass	80	Serenade, Op 48	<b>9</b> 40	Trio Appassionata – 'Gone into	
Colonel Bogey Variations	<b>₩</b> 71	Pritchard		Saxton	33	Piano Concerto No 1	38	night are all the eyes'	6
Morgan, D		Skyspace	46		40		30	Kristinn Árnason –	
Violin Concerto	45	Prokofiev		Psalm: A Song of Ascents	46	Thuille		'Transfiguratio'	7
Moscheles	-		25	Shakespeare Scenes	46	Songs – Various	81	Sam Arnidon – 'Road Trip'	4
Grand Duo, 'Hommage à Weber'	,	Cello Sonata, Op 119	35	Schillings		Tiomkin		Erling Blöndal Bengtsson –	
Op 103	69	Cinderella – Adagio		Abenddämmerung	84	Dial M for Murder - Suite	46	'Gramophone Tribute'	9
•	09	(arr Rostropovich)	35	Schmelzer		Strangers on a Train – Suite	46	Hana Blaňíková –	
Mouton		Piano Concerto No 2	38	Harmonia a 5	84	Tomasi		'Vienna 1709'	9!
Noe noe psallite noe	83	Piano Concerto No 3	<b>≌. 35</b>	Schnittke	04	Trumpet Concerto	33		-
Mozart		Piano Concertos - complete	96			Trumpet Concerto	33	Richard Bonynge –	
Adagio, KAnh206a	65	Piano Sonata No 2	73	Drei geistliche Gesänge	85	V		'Ballet Music and Entr'actes	8
Ch'io mi scordi di te?, K505	∌ 37			Schubert				from French Opera'	
Così fan tutte	91	Romeo and Juliet	73	Fantasy in F minor for		Vaughan Williams		Simon Desbrulais – 'Psalm'	40
Divertimentos – Nos 9, 12,		(piano transcription)	73	piano duet	<b>₽ 71</b>	Fantasia on a Theme by		Lucia Duchoňová – 'Melancholy'	' 84
13 & 14	57	The Love for Three Oranges –	25	Impromptus, D899	69	Thomas Tallis	42	Guðný Guðmundsdóttir	
	32	March	35	Octet, D803	58	Five Variants of 'Dives		- 'Violin Concertos' (various)	4!
Il re pastore – 'L'amerò, sarò costante'	97	The Stone Flower – Waltz (both		Quartettsatz, D703	58	and Lazarus'	42	Thomas Gould – 'Bach to Parker	r' <b>6</b> 8
		arr Limonov)	35	- '		Lord, thou hast been our refu		Anna Gourari – Visions fugitives	
Oboe Concerto, K314	32	Toccata in D minor, Op 11	73	Symphony No 9, 'Great'	40		ge <b>03</b>		
Piano Concertos - Nos 14 & 21		Visions fugitives, Op 22	72	Schumann		Symphony No 3,	40		<b>₽. 68</b>
8	₹ 37	Pujol		Cello and Piano Works - various	59	'Pastoral Symphony'	42	Ensemble Clément Janequin –	
Piano Sonatas - No 2, K280;		Concion amatoria	72	Études symphoniques, Op 13	64	The Wasps – Overture	42	'Au Sainct nau'	8:
No 12, K332	70			Faschingsschwank aus Wien	96	Veracini		'Music for Alfred Hitchcock'	40
Piano Sonatas - No 6; No 8	65	Tonadilla	72	Sciarrino	-	Adriano in Siria	93	John Kitchen - 'The Usher Hall	
Piano Sonatas – various	65	_				Verdi		Organ, Vol 2'	7
	<b>№ 71</b>	R		Berceuse	40	Il trovatore	₩ 94	Lang Lang – 'At the Royal	
Piano Works – various	66	Rabi		Cantare con silenzio	40	Villa-Lobos			<b>2</b> 2 7
			84	Libro notturno delle voci	40			Tomasz Lis – 'Impromptus'	6
Romance, KAnh205	65	Zu spät	84	Sei Capricci	70	Concerto for Guitar			0.
Serenade No 11, K375	<u>₽</u> . 57	Rachmaninov		Scriabin		and Small Orchestra	31	Lorin Maazel – '20th-Century	
Sonata in D major for		Eleven Songs	58		68	Vivaldi		Portraits'	8
two pianos	<b>₽ 71</b>	Etudes-tableaux	73	Complete Poèmes		Concerto for cello and strings		Wakako Nakaso – 'Russia'	8
Symphonies - Nos 39 & 40	37	O Theodokos, immer wachend		Deux poèmes, Op 69	70	in E minor	97	Odhecaton - 'De Passione'	8
Variations – on 'Ah, vous dirai-je		im Gebet	85	Etudes – complete	73	W		Güher and Süher Pekinel –	
Maman', K265; on 'La belle			25 271	Mazurkas	73	W			<b>2</b> 227
Françoise', K353; on 'Salve tu,	,	Preludes – selection	73	Prelude, Op 74 No 4		Wagner		James Rhodes –	
Domine', K398; K500	65			(arr D Matthews)	55	Parsifal	₩ 94	'Love in London'	<u>~</u> 7
"Variations – on 'Mio caro	-	Six Moments Musicaux	73	Sermizy	-	Waxman		John Shirley-Quirk –	
Adone', K180;		Songs - various	97	Au bois de dueil	83				8
on 'Lison dormait', K264	65	Variations on a Theme of Corell	i <b>73</b>			Rear Window – Suite	46	'English Song'	6
	33	Rameau		Dison Nau à pleine teste	83	Rebecca – Suite	46	Oscar Shumsky –	
Mudarra		Castor et Pollux – Tristes apprêts	s <b>84</b>	L'on sonne une cloche	83	Weber		'Legendary Treasur	es' <b>9</b>
Fantasia que contrahaze la harpa		**		Vous perdez temps heretiques		Abu Hassan – Overture	69	Grigory Sokolov –	
en la manera de Ludovico	72	Dardanus – Gravement;	0.4	infames	83	Allemandes, Op 4 – excs	69	'The Salzburg Recit	tal' <b>70</b>
Gallarda	72	Rondeau tendre	84	Shostakovich		Der Freischütz – Overture	69	Magda Tagliaferro – 'Art of	
Pavana de Alexandre	72	Le berger fidèle	80	Fifteen Preludes, Op 34			69	Magda Tagliaferro'	90
Muhly		Les Sauvages	70	(all transcr Urasin)	58	Eight Pieces, Op 60		Tagore String Trio -	
A Long Line	68	Orphée	80	Preludes – selection	73	Piano Concerto No 2, Op 32	69	English Music for Ob	oe' <b>6</b>
Myers		Pièces de clavecin – Suite in			13	Silvana – Overture	69	Truro Cathedral Choir –	
=	73	A minor/major; Suite in		String Quartet No 2		Six Pieces, Op 10	69	'Blow out, ye bugl	ec, 8,
Johnny on the Spot	72		<b>→66</b>	, ,	40	Six Pieces, Op 3	69		<b>U</b> .
N		Pièces de clavecin en concerts -		Simon		Weerbeke		Collegium Vocale Gent –	
		No 2; No 5	80	Hearts and Bones (arr Muhly)	47	Tenebrae factae sunt	83	'Rameau's Funer	al' <b>8</b> 4
Nielcon			55	Stanford			03	Bruno Walter –	
Nielsen	35	Zoroastre –	84	"For lo, I raise up"	83	Weinberg		'Walter conducts Brahms'	8
<b>Nielsen</b> Symphonies 5 & 6		Air des esprits infernaux	04	Strauss		Chamber Symphonies –		Carolin Widmann - 'Reflections'	· 70
Symphonies 5 & 6		•		J-11 GU33		Nos 3 & 4	<b>9</b> 43	1	
Symphonies 5 & 6		Raskatov		Ar. I. C				Various artists –	
Symphonies 5 & 6		Raskatov Monk's Music: Seven Words by		Violin Sonata	97	Weiss		Various artists – 'British String Concert	os' <b>4</b> 5
Symphonies 5 & 6	71	Raskatov	80	Strauss, R			igue <b>72</b>	'British String Concert	os' <b>4!</b>
Symphonies 5 & 6  Obrecht Carmina Burana		Raskatov Monk's Music: Seven Words by	80			Weiss	Figue <b>72</b>	'British String Concert Various artists –	
Symphonies 5 & 6  O  Obrecht		Raskatov Monk's Music: Seven Words by Starets Silouan	80 32	Strauss, R		<b>Weiss</b> Sonata No 34 – Allemande; Couite No 19 – Bourrée	72	'British String Concert	
Symphonies 5 & 6  Obrecht Carmina Burana		Raskatov Monk's Music: Seven Words by Starets Silouan Ravel		Strauss, R Arabella	₽ 92	Weiss Sonata No 34 – Allemande; G	-	'British String Concert Various artists –	Series

gramophone.co.uk GRAMOPHONE FEBRUARY 2015 129

# ILLUSTRATION: PHILIP BANNISTER

# Janie Dee

The award-winning British actress and singer on rediscovering her classical roots, performing at Aldeburgh and the eclecticism of cabaret

hen I was growing up, we listened to a lot of Russian music – Tchaikovsky, Prokofiev, Rimsky-Korsakov, Shostakovich, Rachmaninov. I remember being woken up most Sunday mornings by the 1812 Overture, which isn't what you want when you're a teenager having a lie-in. I played piano by ear (I got by) and learnt the recorder at school. I started learning the violin but I hated the lessons and I'm afraid to say it was because of the teacher. It's so gruelling to try and play the violin perfectly, and you need someone to make it exciting and bearable – unfortunately my teacher wasn't that person.

We didn't go to traditional concerts when I was a child but I do remember my granny taking me to see the Russian Army – I'll never forget the wonderful Russian choral singing and those red boots. I think the first proper classical concert I went to was probably about 10 years ago, when my husband and I heard Barenboim play Beethoven's *Emperor* Concerto at the Royal Festival Hall. I now go and see lots of things, especially opera, since I have lots of friends from that world.

After studying at the Arts Educational School, I went to Rome to teach dance. I had been taught singing at Arts Ed by Mary Hammond but I wanted some training that was more formal and I found that in Italy. Michael Aspinall had moved to Rome to sing there and he taught me to how to breathe – into the body, the back, the tummy...He wouldn't let me sing a note until I had mastered it. After about four weeks of training, I got up to sing in a piano bar and all my friends immediately noticed the difference.

When I was doing *Showboat* with Opera North 20 years ago, something else happened that changed the way I sing. We were in Nottingham staying in these beautiful digs when I saw a poster for transcendental meditation. The guy who owned the house taught me, Janis Kelly and Jan Hartley for three days running and none of us have looked back. It's such a gift. Four days after I'd learnt, I went onstage and someone said, 'What's happened to your voice? You sound like a lark!'

**So I suppose** what I'm saying is that you can always learn a bit more as a singer. It's important for people in our art form to remember to tap into other sources, particularly classical. But although part of me feels I could have a go at doing an opera role, I'd be very nervous about going into that world.

Having said that, I did perform at Snape Maltings in Aldeburgh for the Britten centenary celebrations in 2013. I've known the composer Guy Barker for a long time, ever since we did a concert at ENO together. He said he kept hearing my voice and wanted to write something for it. For *That Obscure Hurt*, he asked me to speak the lines and then wrote the music





# THE RECORD I COULDN'T LIVE WITHOUT

Rachmaninov Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini Vladimir Ashkenazy pf LSO / André Previn Decca (€) (3) (two CDs + (2)) 478 6443DH3 (9/72<sup>R</sup>) I love this piece, and it reminds me of my childhood - we listened to Russian music all the time at home.

around them. It was extraordinary being in Aldeburgh. It was a bit like how we were accepted by the ballet and theatre worlds in Russia during the tour with Shakespeare's Globe a few months ago. The audiences at Snape were totally brilliant – they loved the newness of the music and totally went with it.

I think there's a good argument for making special theatres for opera, for musical comedy, for drama...but as an artist who's lucky enough to do all these things, I do think they can sometimes be brought together. In the middle of one of my cabaret shows, I might find something that Shakespeare or Pinter has said and use it to introduce a song. And for a recent Noël Coward cabaret, I added in a bit of Gershwin, because Coward knew him, just to jolly the afternoon along. For my upcoming gig at Kings Place - part of Lucy Parham's Word/Play concert series – I'm sure that my repertoire will be just as varied. I'll be singing a selection of cabaret songs and West End hits, but I'll be telling stories and probably throwing a Jacobean song in there too, since by then I'll be rehearsing for a concert at the Globe. That's where cabaret wins - you can bring together modern music, old music, contemporary writing and historical writing in a very harmonious way. @

'Wake Up with Janie Dee' is at Kings Place, London, at 11.30am on February 8; visit kingsplace.co.uk

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Cildoz.



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